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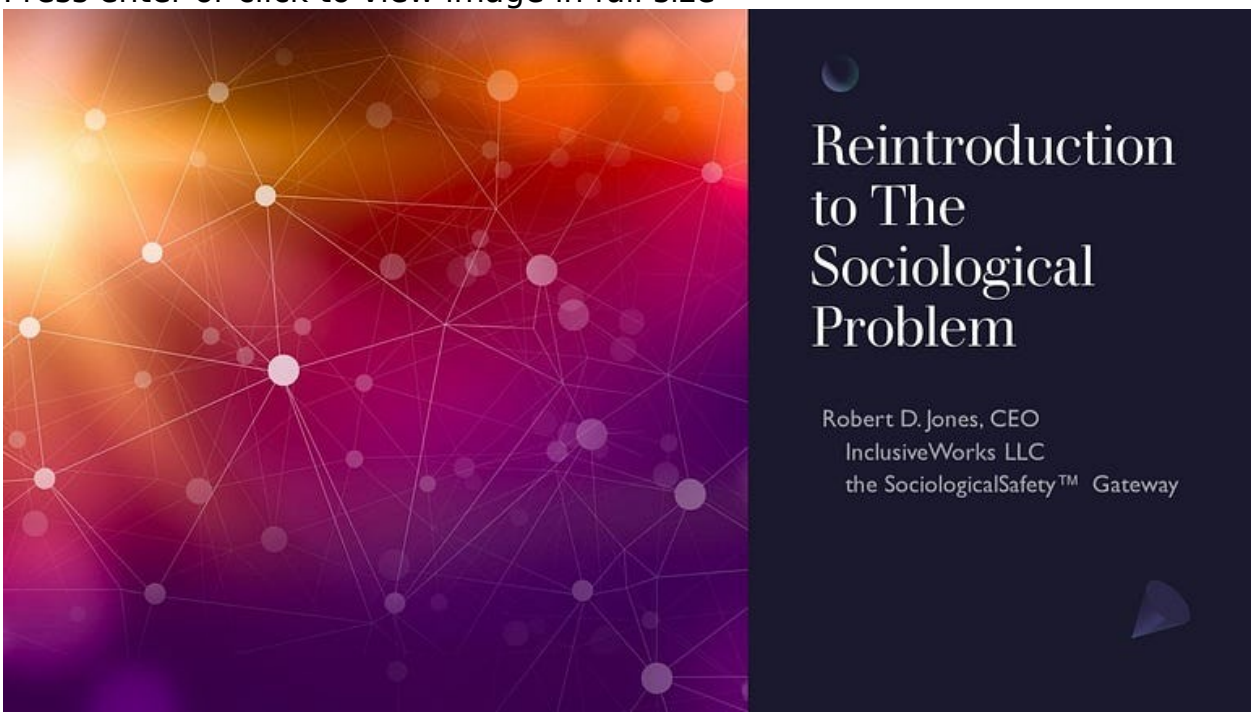

Grammar of the Sociological Problem

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Prologue

In 2016 I was consulting for a global pharma company in Cambridge, MA, working in an area of endeavor that was quite familiar to me, but not my main area of consulting. In helping the Global Diversity Officer work through organizational challenges of his assignment related to an internal functional merger, the typical problems surfaced. I designed some atypical approaches to them.

Over the decades of doing similar work, one recurring theme had been difficulties with meanings in the language of change. In this particular case, there was a managerial need to fit proposed solution descriptions into language that CEOs understood, but that didn’t necessarily flange up with the final deliverable or the way the root problem was to be addressed.

By that, I mean the specific nature of the linguistic disconnect was what I often perceived as an inability (or unwillingness) to both name and aim at root cause of social dysfunction, which was most often seen as well beyond the scope of the contract, but not entirely beyond the reach of the client organization(s). That was especially true for those in the F-500s I had served, with which there was almost always the capacity for at least putting a dent in large-scale problems that existed in society outside of the organization but which fed the problems I was being contracted to address within the organizations.

Consultants and their contracting managers, for example, can’t say to a CEO, “For the purpose of making your workforce more innovative, we propose to eliminate poverty.” In fact, though, if every organization adopted certain policies and practices that some consultants might propose to their clients regarding pay inequity, global

poverty might indeed be undone over a short time frame, with a direct positive effect of increasing innovation globally, starting in the organization as the epicenter.

However, the bridging language for making that feasible or even rational isn’t there in organizational consulting work. In large measure it’s because, as in this example, innovation is treated as a property of organizational competitive advantage, not a universal objective for the advancement of humankind. It’s not that leadership misses that mark, but that they’re persuaded not to aim for it.

The manifest problem is that we have instead learned to use a more narrowly bounded language that feeds broader problems and starves pointed solutions in praxis. We thereby wittingly install and instill organizational processes and practices that more deeply embed causation rather than buttress transformation or transfer remediation to the world around our organizations.

An example was the wave of “unconsciousness” that swept through the American business sector in the early 21st Century. The business sector suddenly became convinced that the invention of the fMRI in the 1990s was the key to unlocking the secrets our brains keep from us.

By 2010 America had become enamored with the idea that we were keeping two sets of psychological books. One set we show to our interpersonal social external auditors, while the other set remains locked away in our psychological safe, maintained by an implicit internal bookkeeper whose identity we cannot know — unless of course, we hire a neuroscientist to administer a battery of diagnostic tests and coax our biases out into the open where we can roundly pummel them.

With that, the segment of the HR consulting community that most needed to engage in the facilitation and diffusion of technologies for mitigating manifest discrimination and overt harmful behaviors instead succumbed to the siren call of mental blind spots. Diversity Consultants suddenly swerved left away from civil rights and representation to focus on the inherent inferentialism in the language and practice of psychology in a futile attempt to relieve social interaction problems through industrial-organizational psychology.

Rather than focusing on managing behaviors that could be seen and touched, they were swept into recentering our attention on things we cannot see until it’s already too late. By 2020 neuroscience had managed to “discover” a dizzying codex wheel of cognitive biases representing the hopelessy escalating warring between our brains and minds, with

implicit bias researchers and consultants still warning that ‘we have only begun to fight.’

By the time of this writing, an unconscious America hasn’t yet realized freedom from our diverse states of implicit bias. We are still likened to heavily biased sleepers realizing we’re dreaming, but unable to wake up.

But we’ve known this for ages, and not just America. The now ancient Adelbert Ames Window Illusion (1947) demonstrated that we cannot outthink our own brain any more than we can outrun our own feet. Science continually increases our knowledge of why and how our brains work as they do, and we can cooperate with it, go with the flow. When it comes to competition with our brain, we are clearly overmatched.

In the process, we’ve learned that external realities shape what we percieve. At the same time, our brain gives us the ability to build and shape what exists outside of them. As Ames demonstrated, we can physically construct our own psychical illusions, and can not only blithely live comfortably within them, but we can grow sprawling social enterprises that will provide shelter for our illusions, and systems to vigorously defend them.

Through decades of working for and consulting in organizations, it became apparent that though there were effective solutions available for common social interaction problems, the language by which we were describing the problems was restrictive and distorted such that clients couldn’t clearly hear the connection of proposed solutions to the underlying problems. So they most often opted for what they understood vs. what they needed.

My work and studies through the 1990s and onward led to my understanding that one barrier can be understood as anamorphosis, the need to view a problem from the proper (designed) angle to see it for what it is. But the required angle was often suffiently obtuse such that it wasn’t mentally accessible in the language of the social sciences, especially so in organizational psychology. Sociology seemed to get closer, still wasn’t quite there.

My emphasis shifted from searching for the right choices from among existing options to searching for something that didn’t exist. I didn’t know what it was, of course, but I began paying more attention to empty spaces, gaps in logic, reason, and language. I was looking for exactly the right place to stand.

In the course of my explorations, while hacking my way through the unintelligible academically thick underbrush of sociology, I inadvertantly stepped into the thin air of a well concealed hole. Sociological Safety™ wasn't on any map. Yet, there it was.

Laying there at the bottom of that pit, looking up at the opening, I wondered how I could have missed such a glaring aperture. Then, as my eyes adjusted to the darkness, I began to see the treasures laying there on the bottom around me. But I also began to see the bones of those who had found this place, apparently many years before me. There must have been another problem. After calling out at the top of my lungs for help, I realized the only way to climb out was to write a book. Reaching into my backpack for my journal, I committed these entries for posterity while waiting to be found.

Thank goodness you're here.

- The InclusiveWorks inception and conceptualization of Sociological Safety™ turned out to be a surprisingly novel idea. We'd been searching for it for a good while. The term "sociological safety" doesn't currently exist in the social sciences as its parallel form does in psychology. More surprisingly,

researching it uncovered collateral questions about sociology itself that, as it turned out, haven't been answered, and in some cases, perhaps haven't even been asked.

- The hypothesis began with the belief that the class "sociological problem" existed, containing a number of different specific problems, and would satisfy the research need for the purpose of establishing Sociological Safety™ as a viable concept and member of the class "sociological problem." The alternative hypothesis quickly took over, that the class "sociological problem" would not be found easily, if it existed at all.

- The purpose of this writing evolved as the path of the research became a winding trail through relevant literature between 1905 and 2020 in pursuit of what turned out to be a sociological unicorn. The method of investigation started with nothing more than the intent to find the definition of a "*sociological problem.*" It took this researcher through linguistics, nuanced definitions of the social sciences and terminologies, the literature of some of the great sociologists of the 20th century, perspectives of non-sociologists of relevant concern, and their wondering

about the nature, purpose, relevance, future, and sustainability of sociology.

- The results include instantiation of the class "sociological problem", re-instituting it as a used and useful term of art in sociology, and introduction of a new variable, Sociological Safety™.
- Opening up reconsideration of *its* ***parent context,*** the sociological problem, is a step toward closing a "hole in science" by first putting a name to it. Implications for sociology include the potential for meaningful sociological praxis, bridging sociological theory and praxis, and clarification of perspectives that establish a unique and novel standing of Sociological Safety™ as one discrete domain of a robust safety ecosystem.

Grammar of the Sociological Problem

A Hole in Science

PART I. Three of these things belong together. One of these things is not the same.

- **Physiological Problem**
- **Psychological Problem**

- **Sociological Problem**
- **Social Problem**

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gCxrkl2igGY

The InclusiveWorks® concept of *Sociological Safety*™ is novel but parallel to several more familiar popular ideas. The name catches folks off guard, as it has an odd but intuitive resonance with hearers or readers.

The extrusion of the “Sociological Safety™” domain from older models of human motivational needs makes it possible to treat safety as a robust ecosystem. It opens the domain of psychological safety to a more broadly generalizable calculation of “belief and feeling” about interaction with ***both physical and human domain systems.*** It elevates the psychology of safety well beyond the tight constraint of small team interaction or the psychology of incident management, encompassing the social psychology of even large sociological groups, or very small ones, even individual psychological safety.

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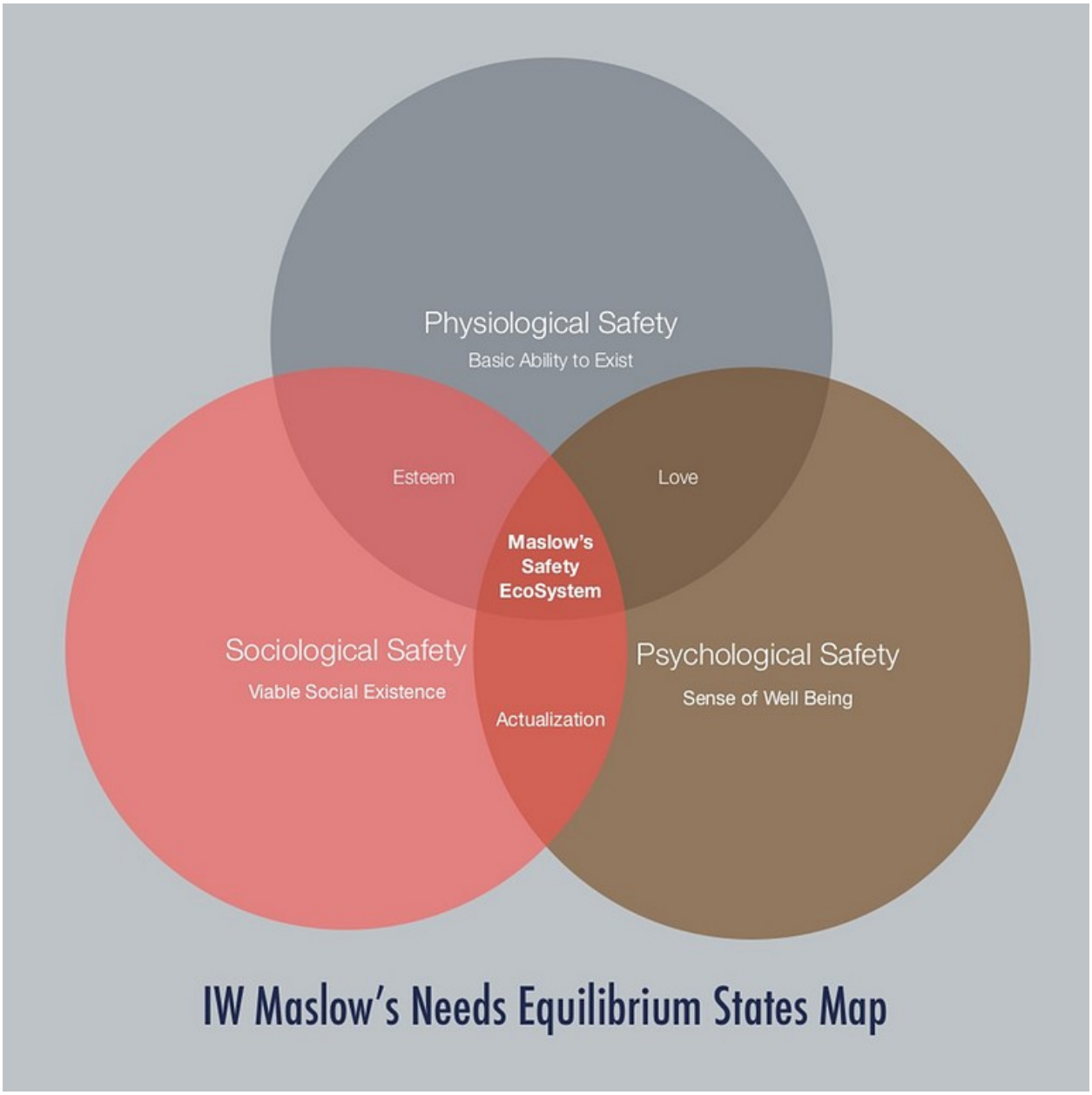

Illustration of an extrusion of a new Sociological Safety™ domain from older models of human motivational needs. Copyright © 2019 — *Robert D. Jones, InclusiveWorks LLC — All Rights Reserved*

The idea of safety in any form should have broad fundamental appeal, from the basement workshop to investor stock exchanges. The general concept of safety isn't so complex that it cannot easily translate into most areas of our

individual and collective lives. So it's no surprise that people are at least open to knowing more about the idea of *sociological safety,* if not intrigued. The term *sociologic*a*l*, however, is more complex, nuanced in surprisingly unobvious ways, not so easy to unravel.

Among sociologists, the uniqueness of pairing the noun *"safety"* with the adjective "*sociological*" is the reason the term "*sociological safety*" brings a head-tilt, raised eyebrow, even a nose-wrinkle from time to time. The syntax doesn't match day-to-day linguistic experience, even for professionals in related social sciences, like psychology, counseling, or organizational science. But that's not the only odd-sounding pairing with *sociological*.

The subject of this writing, however, isn't Sociological Safety™ itself.

InclusiveWorks addresses two matters herein, 1) ***the parent context*** for Sociological Safety™, and 2) why the Sociological Safety™ is born out of a game-changing way of approaching social, societal, and institutional problems. In the main, this deals with ***the parent context*** of Sociological Safety™ and how putting a name to that foundational context may be a step toward closing a "hole in science."

What is That Parent Context?

Sociological Safety™ is an *outgrowth* of a genuine terminological "unicorn of sociology." This unicorn is a little-known but special class of problems in and of the social sciences known as the "*sociological problem*." It is a class in the same way as the germ theory is "a class of medical theories applying to many specific diseases, each of which is associated with a specific infectious agent." (*What is a medical theory?* Paul Thagard, Philosophy Department, University of Waterloo, Canada, Multidisciplinary Approaches to Theory in Medicine, Volume 3, Editor: L. McNamara, 2005, Elsevier B.V.) Sightings of the class "sociological problem" are rare, encountered only by those taking a stroll through the thick theoretical weeds and deep woods of sociology's history.

This isn't written specifically for sociologists, though it will be a pleasure to entertain at least a few of them. I've written this for the broad array of professionals in varying social arenas (including "Diversity") who are *not sociologists* but may wonder what they do, how they think, and why they may have never actually met a sociologist off-campus after graduation. (There are fewer than 3,000 employed in the USA today.) I've written this for those who will question why *Sociological Safety*™ requires a clear delineation from psychological safety. It is addressed to those who think and talk about social problems, who may be actively engaged in

working for social progress, particularly in and around business and industry, but have only indirectly considered differentiating between *social* and *sociological* in their work.

In the course of working through the meaning and methods of sociological safety, I recognized that someone was bound to ask, “What is the nature of the problem(s) it is meant to address? Isn’t psychological safety enough?” The answer to the latter is easy. No, it is not, and many are beginning to articulate loudly and clearly why the reach and intent of psychological safety need careful reconsideration. The answer to the former, however, is not so simple and straightforward, as I discovered. It became apparent that ***no one I spoke with knew the meaning of the term I used to name the nature of the problem(s)*** that *sociological safety* is intended to address, *not even sociologists*.

An excellent example is at the INSPQ website at which the excellent “Definition of the concept of safety” is found. Since it is a multilingual site, the definition helps us to understand that the issue of meaning is not one of language alone, but of the underlying conception of safety. It begins with, “Safety is a state in which hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological or material harm are controlled in order to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community. It is an essential resource for everyday life,

needed by individuals and communities to realise their aspirations." Neither that nor the remainder of the definition mentions the word "sociological," but it instead chooses the term "social" in the subtext.

That consistent kind of finding in the investigation of naming conventions for safety, sociology, and psychology is what launched this survey. The purpose of the search was to answer to a reasonable extent what I only thought I knew of the academic and technical explanation of the parent sociological concept that underpins *sociological safety*. This survey began with a list of ***four types of problems***. Following this story along the winding path in the search for the one very unusual type of problem among them is challenging, especially for a nonsociologist, like me. It might quickly begin to feel like a slog, so hang in there with this exploration.

The best place to begin is usually at the beginning. Right?

PART II. WHAT DOES "SOCIOLOGICAL" MEAN IN THE FIRST PLACE?

The definition of the word "sociological" at first seems straightforward. "Having to do with sociology." The meaning, though, isn't that basic.

- Oxford defines it as "*concerning the development, structure, and functioning of human society.*"
- Collins is more expansive, "**1.** of or having to do with human society, its organization, needs, development, etc. **2.** of sociology." ***In American English***, however, Collins expands it to **1.** of, pertaining to, or characteristic of sociology and its methodology, **2.** dealing with social questions or problems, esp. focusing on cultural and environmental factors rather than on psychological or personal characteristics, **3.** organized into a society; social
- Merriam-Webster also goes at it a little more expansively. "**1:** of or relating to sociology or to the methodological approach of sociology **2:** oriented or directed toward social needs and problems."

Webster's and Collins' definitions of *sociological* relate it to matters of interest to the science of sociology *about sociology*, explicitly turning the definition inward in a way that implicates ***how*** sociological work is conducted. It points to *the way* of sociology, its "methodological approach," instead of strictly focusing on what sociology is, what and who it works on, and its primary areas/subjects. It seems to demand that something cannot be sociological unless it is

conducted or performed in a very specific way. I found that oddity both striking and puzzling in defining *sociological*, but the reason became clearer as this unfolds, but that doesn't mean it made sense.

Compare the term *psychological* to clarify the uniqueness in the way a sister social science's adjective is defined.

Definitions of *psychological:*

- Merriam-Webster **1a:** of or relating to psychology, **b:** MENTAL, **2:** directed toward the will or toward the mind specifically in its conative function.
- Oxford: of, affecting, or arising in the mind; related to the mental and emotional state of a person; relating to psychology; (of an ailment or problem) having a mental rather than a physical cause.
- Collins: 1. relating to psychology, concerned with a person's mind and thoughts.

Psychology certainly does have methodological approaches. Many in fact. "Methodology in psychology refers to procedures researchers use to answer specific questions. There is no single methodology that all psychologists use."

The definitions of psychology broadly imply the science of psychology. However, note that the definition of this science doesn't *explicitly* extend to "*the methodological approach" of* psychology. The methodological approach of psychology is not intrinsic to its definition, as it is with sociology. Oxford's treatment is the same.

The definitions of "*physiological*" are similarly situated, as in Collins', "**1.** of or pertaining to physiology, **2.** consistent with the normal functioning of an organism." Again, it implies the science but doesn't specifically call out the *methods or approaches of physiology*.

"Sociological" by definition *expressly implicates the scientific methods of sociology* in a quite different way than do the definitions of its peer sciences. The definitional variance from its two sisters may seem insignificant. The consequence, however, is not. Not only is it worth understanding, but it's also critical. Here's why.

It wouldn't occur to most people to assume that a *physiological issue* might be a matter of the *dysfunctionality* of the approaches to the science of physiology itself, or that a *psychological issue* might be a matter relating to the *dysfunctionality* of the methods of psychology. That kind of definitional connection isn't an

intuitive leap. Though they are both associated with the diagnosis and treatment of physical or mental dysfunction *in their patients*, most people don't and wouldn't immediately take them to express or imply that there is some dysfunction among their physiologists or psychologists, their methods, practices, or with the sciences themselves.

We're only human, so it wouldn't necessarily be wrong to do so. We logically *could assume that there is something wrong with science and scientists.* Maybe sometimes we should. For example, American Psychological Association (APA) recently apologized for its longstanding contributions to systemic racism. Its most conscientious members apparently didn't rule out the possibility, and they were right. Still, most people usually wouldn't assume that about science and scientists from the start, mostly because of the long and loud claims of scientific objectivity and evidence-based practice. Because of sociology's unique decision to embed the elements of approaches and methods into the definition of sociology, the possibility of both functionality and dysfunctionality of the science is inherent and at the same time well hidden.

That's not wrong. It's merely different, and it's not without drawbacks.

Now that we understand the shaded syntactical and definitional inconsistency of "*sociological,"* and the augmented application to the *methodology and approache*s of sociology and its practice, we can see how differently each of the three sciences try to compartmentalize dysfunction. As well, it starts to dig into why Sociological Safety™, or the lack thereof, needs its own distinct compartment.

Let's next examine what happens when we pair each of the three sciences with the word "*problem.*"

PART III. THE UNICORN SOCIOLOGICAL TERM

The definition of **Physiological Problems** is: **'**conditions, disorders, or diseases by which the organs in the body malfunction causing **illness** that interferes with the way the body's functions are carried out. An abundance of examples exists in medical journals of diseases, disorders. **Physiology** is defined as the branch of biology that deals with the normal functions of living organisms and their parts; how a living organism or bodily part functions.'

The definition of **Psychological Problems** is: **'**disorders, also referred to as mental disorders, are abnormalities of the mind that result in persistent behavior patterns that can seriously affect day-to-day function and life. Examples are cataloged and described in the Diagnostic and Statistical

Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). **Psychology** is defined as the scientific study of the human mind and its functions, especially those affecting behavior in a given context; the mental characteristics or attitude of a person or group; the mental and emotional factors governing a situation or activity.'

Both descriptions of the types of problems in the natural sciences are congruous in structure and implications, i.e., biological and physiological (physical), as it is with psychological (mental). The common meanings are easily found in the literature of the respective fields through direct web searches.

Remember, Oxford's definition of ***sociological*** is threefold, "*concerning the development, structure, and functioning of human society.*" As a neutrally constructed meaning, the "sociological problem" should be parallel to and consistent with its morphological cousins with respect to its application to problematic operation in those three facets of the problems it seeks to diagnose and solve, those being societal developmental problems, societal structural problems, societal functional problems resulting in social dysfunction or disruption — but it isn't. T.S. Eliot picked up on the angular incongruity when using "social" with the term "justice." Eliot wrote:

“I must introduce a parenthetical protest against the abuse of the current term ‘social justice’. From meaning ‘justice in relations between groups or classes’ it may slip into meaning a particular assumption as to what these relations should be; and a course of action might be supported because it represented the aim of ‘social justice’, which from the point of view of ‘justice’ was not just. The term ‘social justice’ is in danger of losing its rational content — which would be replaced by a powerful emotional charge. I believe that I have used the term myself: it should never be employed unless the user is prepared to define clearly what social justice means to him, and why he thinks it just.” [T.S. Eliot, footnote in “*Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*,” 1948]

Eliot’s argument is not about grammar, but about what might be called ‘meaning creep’, (a *loss of rational content*) resulting from the word *social* being too splashy, too imprecise an adjective for modifying a term like justice. Other terms coupled with justice don’t generally evoke criticism of that nature (e.g., *civil, criminal, procedural, distributive, restorative*, etc.).

Eliot’s objection can be understood as the geometric function of loss of parallelism, the state of being parallel or of corresponding in some way.

Even the slightest degree out of parallel with other forms of justice means that the looser term “social” means justice will of necessity eventually intersect with emotional arguments blended with *the idea of justice*. Noted scholar Amartya Sen argued on the side of Eliot, that the theory of social justice and “its grip on social and political thinking, has long left practical realities far behind.” Eliot saw danger in the emotional intersect, arguing that emotion runs counter to the idea of “blind” or neutral justice, and risks reliance on the arbitrary case.

The irony in that is, in grammar and syntax, parallelism refers to the use of the same grammatical form in two or more instances in a sentence, adjacent sentences, or clauses, also called parallel structure or parallel construction. The word “s*ociological”* is morphologically “built” in parallel with psychological, biological, and physiological. But a funny thing happened on the way to sociology’s lexicon.

The definitional skewing of *sociological* in sociology sacrifices parallelism in adjacency. Applying the term sociological in general use, then, isn’t consistent with that of its cousins, but we gloss over that. The English-speaking sociologist rarely uses *sociological* and *problem* in tandem, let alone in the same way as psychological and physiological. Therefore, even the inquiring layman’s mind has never

become familiar or accustomed to hearing "*sociological"* coupled with the word *"problem."*

Our minds have been trained to instantly translate "*sociological*" into the word "*social" when it comes to human interaction problems, or issues such as social justice, social inequality, etc*. We don't unwrap SJWs as "s*ociological justice workers,*" even though the term "sociological justice" exists in the philosophy of law, with robust professional meaning.

It's of no use to argue that the automatic shift from sociological to social is wrong per se. Still, the fact of its incongruity results in search engines mirroring that same switcheroo. Because the search for and occurrence of an exact match for "*sociological problem*" is sufficiently rare, the search algorithms assume it to be a likely error. With the search parameter of "*sociological problem*," the word "*social*" becomes the primary surrogate for *sociological.* In the same way, the human hearer's mind is unconsciously channeled away from the morphological equivalent and to the corollary default form of "*social* problem" as the meaning of "*sociological* problem*.*"

So, here's how that plays out.

The general understanding and formal definition of "*Social Problems*" consistently translate to *social dysfunction.* The definition is *"*Any condition or behavior that has *objective* negative consequences for large numbers of people and that there is general *subjective* recognition of it as conditions or behaviors that need to be addressed." In "The Sociology of Social Problems 12th Edition," the authors suggest that social problems a) are social in nature, b) must be scientifically qualified and validated by sociologists, c) have an undesirable effect on a significant number of people, d) bear the potential to be addressed through collective social action.

Then, distinct from the social problem, there's the rare form, "*sociological problem*."

An initial web search quickly located a definition of the sociological problem buried among Prezi's wide-ranging collection of millions of presentations. The term "social problem" is also referenced in the same succinct user presentation. There is one rather dubious distinction to the particular author's definition of a social problem: "…a social problem…demands explanation…is always defined from the perspective of the powerful." That distinction for social problems makes sense to the extent that the powerful are the only ones who can "demand" much of anything.

Frankly, the rest of us powerless folks are usually kneeling, palms up, pleading for solutions to social problems.

The concise attempt to describe the *sociological problem* on Prezi (*by Bernard Quansah*) is twofold: "The first is that societies have to solve certain fundamental problems first if they are to survive. The second definition is that sociological problem is a problem that demands explanation." It's intriguing but feels insufficient. Other individuated sketchy ideas can be found among scattered sites and papers that approach the topic to attempt to speak to the differentiation, but none that share what appears to be a consensus meaning.

The idea that a sociological problem rises to the level of an *existential societal problem* is tantalizing. But that draws attention from the term sociological. Still, any *societal* problem that is existential in nature makes it perfectly logical that it should demand an *explanation,* consistent with sociology's role of researching *social problems* then sharing *explanations*. The Prezi author's definitional cliffhanger, though? *Who has the role of proposing solutions for unresolved and otherwise unsurvivable societal problems?* Hold that thought, we'll get back to it. The important thing, for now, is that the definition doesn't quite gel, and raises additional questions.

One more thing.

In the physiological, psychological, and *social* case, there are manuals of problems, disorders, and conditions describing and defining each of them and listing possible cures, treatments, contraindications for the treatments, or discussing historical means of addressing them.

- "Clinical Handbook of **Psychological Disorders**, Sixth Edition: A Step-by-Step Treatment Manual,"
- "Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of **Mental Disorders**, 5th Edition:", (**DSM-**5 PDF free),
- "Applied Anatomy & **Physiology** for Manual Therapists 1st Edition,"
  "Stress: **Physiology**, Biochemistry, and Pathology: Handbook of Stress Series, Volume 3 1st Edition, Kindle Edition",
- "Instructor's Manual and Test Bank for Henslin and Fowler — **Social Problems** A Down-to-Earth Approach Paperback — January 1, 2010",
- "**Social Problems** across the Life Course (Understanding Social Problems: An SSSP Presidential Series) Kindle Edition

More than the linguistic disconnect, there is a glaring disconnect of the term ‘sociological’ from diagnostics leading directly to treatment. Unlike physiology and psychology, there’s no equivalent ‘Handbook, Reference Manual, or Catalog of *Sociological Problems’* for distinctly sociological diagnoses and treatments. Not yet, anyway.

With all of that said, it isn’t difficult to see how the unfamiliar sounding “*sociological problem*” would be heard semi-consciously as translating to “social problem.” Social programs or social initiatives usually address social problems, most often reaching to the micro-level in the form of ground-level casework at which “safety” is intuitively grasped but not necessarily explicitly named. When we hear terms like “social safety net,” “social security,” “social welfare,” or “social services,” we get a clear mental image of precisely what social problem(s) they might address, all the way down to a check in the mailbox or a home visit.

Physiological safety and psychological safety are reasonably intuitive terms, as well. Our mind can quickly wrap itself around the concepts and the problems they might address through field-pertinent initiatives, if not the details of the approach, within or under the auspices of the appropriate social institution (medical, philanthropic, community, family, etc.). Any “safety problem” that requires a physician, a

psychologist, police officer, or a social worker can quickly conjure professional service providers who want to do so, and who have the individual expertise to develop and deliver safety solutions.

That is, any but *sociological safety*. If anyone suggested changing the name “Social Security Program” to “Sociological Security Program” or “Social Welfare” to “Sociological Welfare,” the reaction would be, “What exactly does *that* mean, and what’s it going to cost me?”

We can begin to see why the “*sociological problem*” is such a unicorn of terminology in sociology. One has to set out to look for it, invest considerable energy, and hack through the weeds and woods of sociology until it’s spotted before it darts off and vanishes again.

PART IV. HOW DO SOCIOLOGISTS VIEW SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS?

For those of us who are not practitioners of pure science, we tend to think of problems as opportunities for prescriptive solutions, not purely objective explanations or descriptions of observed phenomena. However, as pure research, “Sociology is the study of social life, social change, and the social causes and consequences of human behavior.” (www.asanet.org) Otherwise, it would logically follow that in the next step, there would be solution development by those who have the

most robust knowledge of the complex inner workings of the problem, rather than a scientific shovel-pass to social work and caseworkers.

However, when we listen carefully to "Sociologists on Sociology" for the use of the words solve, resolve, solutions, address, change, alter, or any other term for eliminating and ending given problems in social life, another disconnect appears, that of application.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqbFRa3UyQQ

How does this play out in the pure research profession? Here's an example of what's pervasive in sociology literature: In his stirring presentation, "The wisdom of sociology," Sociology Professor Sam Richards unhesitatingly pairs the
word *sociological* with *wisdom*, *imagination*, *moment*, but not with *"problem*."

In a tight six-page academic critique of "problems and prospects" within sociology, Sociology Professor Dr. Md. Aminul Islam uses the word "social" seventy-three times, problem(s) thirty times, "*sociological*" only thirteen times, and never manages to pair sociological with "*problem"* even once, despite issues he alleges challenge sociology's status as a science. Consistent with that, in a far more expansive 756 pages of "*Encyclopedia of Sociology*" (Edgar F. Borgatta,

Rhonda J. V. Montgomery, Volume 1-Macmillan Reference USA (2000).pdf" by Nizam Azhari, First and Second Editions), the word "sociological" can be found 633 times, but not once paired with the word "problem(s)," which occurs 365 times throughout.

The use of the term "problem" implies that there has to be (or should be) a milieu, a system of thought, within which the problem can be clearly framed, defined, and explained. To sociologists, the implication of a *sociological problem* has a subtle spin that recalibrates the meaning for use within and about the sociology profession.

The term "*sociological problem*" is rarely referenced by laypeople in a deliberative way. In the absence of a side-by-side dictionary analysis of physiological, and psychological, the subtle incongruities of "sociological" remain largely unnoticed. Again, morphologically, the terms are built the same way, but the meaning congruous with *physiological* and *psychological* problems devolves to "*social* problems," not *sociological problems.* Only with "*social*" do all three refer to the adverse outcomes of patients or clients or research subjects.

Yes, those three things (psychological, physiological, and social problems) are the ones that "belong together," but

purely because of the common way they are used, not because they are structured or defined the same way. The three terms that are structured the same way and should belong together are: *physical problems, mental problems, and social problems, which* make more grammatical and syntactical sense. However, for sociologists, the term "*sociological problems"* is not the same, because it is burdened with the built-in reference to those problems of the profession, problems with the execution of the science, and problems with the methods and approaches of its practitioners.

The result is the reality of not only the scarcity of use of the term *sociological problem* in the public domain, but the syntactical disconnect within the science of sociology itself, and the unusualness of the juxtaposition of the term "sociological" with the idea of "problems." There is evidence in the reality of a dearth of literature on the concept of "*Sociological Problems*." That isn't because the concept doesn't exist. The term "sociological problem(s)" itself has been around for a good while.

Its roots harken back to the beginnings of the science of sociology, as it sought parity with the natural sciences. The usage goes as far back as the turn of the 20th Century. Frank Nichols Hagar published a novel titled "American Family, a

Sociological Problem" in 1905 (*The University Publishing Society in New York*). Even if the title is the only time the term "sociological problem" appears in the book, it seems unlikely that Hagar coined it.

Today, the term "sociological problem" and meaning are almost nowhere to be found in the publicly available sociology literature. Even if a layperson (like this author) heads directly to American Sociological Association (ASANET.org) in the hunt for it, the website search bar entry "*sociological imagination*" produces hits, but "*sociological problem"* as a term of art in sociology produces virtually none as if it doesn't exist.

Using Google (or use any other search engine) or Google Scholar to search for "sociological safety," three types of matches consistently turn up.

1. Search engines adjust the search terms, converting "sociological" to either *social* or *societal* used in tandem with safety rather than with "sociological." That's the case even with bracketed quotes or calling for it as an exact match parameter.

2. The relatively rare finds of the exact two-word combo search parameter usually refer to a third term, a noun. For example, in "Ernest Becker: Horror alone

brings peace of mind” there is the phrase, “War is a **sociological safety** valve…” which is the right pairing. But sociological then becomes an adjective modifier of safety, also diagramed as an adjective, and they both describe/modify the subject complement noun. That noun is “the valve,” which grammatically belongs to “War” (i.e., ‘war is a valve’) rather than belonging to safety. That was tricky to properly pull apart with high school grammar. But most other matches seem to be similarly structured, such as “sociological safety tipping point,” “sociological safety net,” or “sociological safety interventions,” etc. In all of them, safety becomes the subject complement noun modifier. Sociological is treated as the adjective modifier of the noun subject of the clause and/or the direct object. (*Whew!*)

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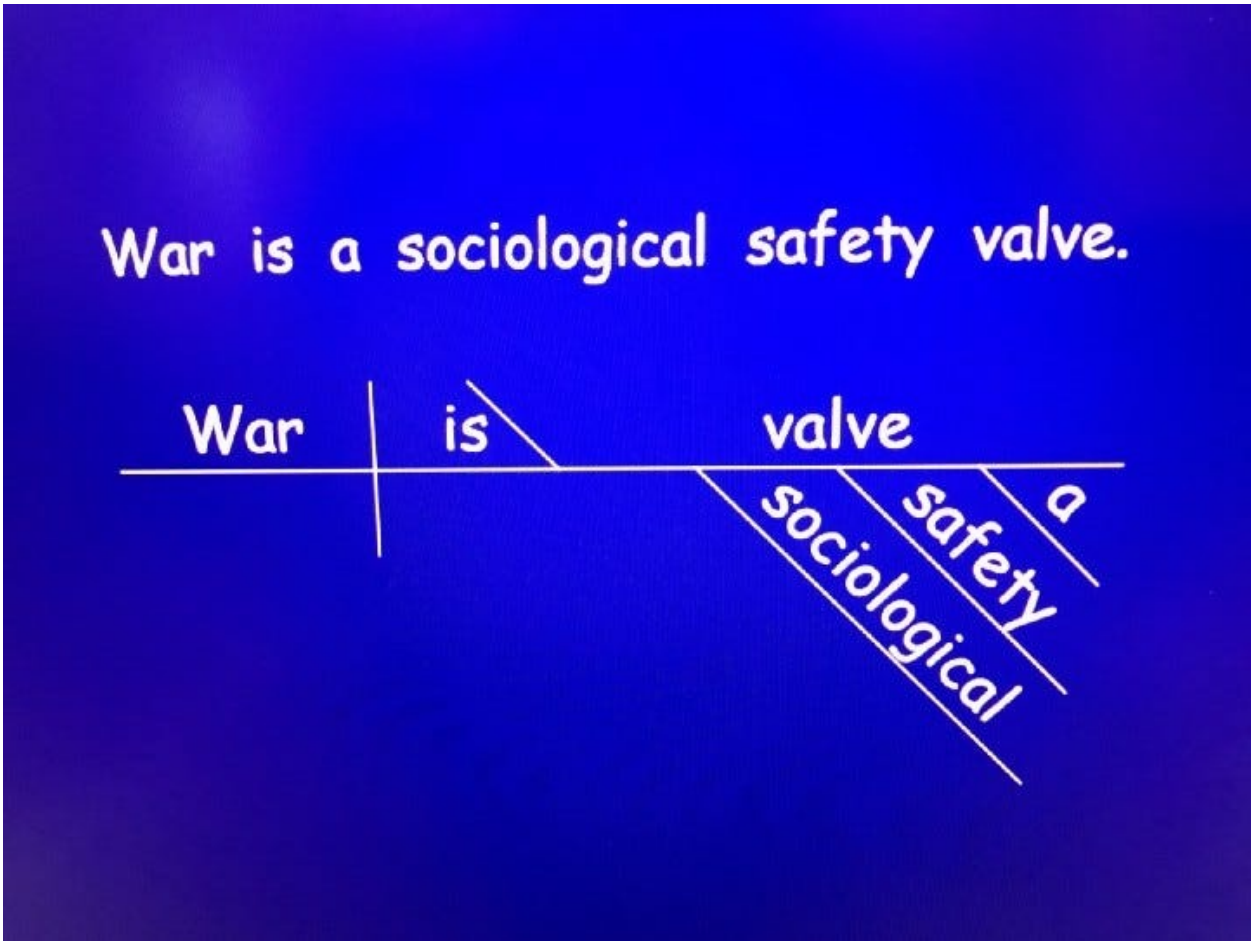

3. Sociological safety where “sociological” is the adjectival modifier of the noun entity “safety” can be found but is exceedingly rare as a stand-alone, as in, for example, “Sociological safety is new,” or “We need sociological safety.” Even when achieving that rare find in a handful of research papers, there is a dearth of attempts to define it. That difficulty in finding a definition is categorically not the case for psychological safety (Edmondson) or physiological safety (Maslow).

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Not surprisingly, the same frequency, grammatical, and definitional problems consistently arise for the term "sociological problem."

James A. Davis' paper comes close, nearly defining a "*sociology problem*," in Sociological Forum, Vol. 9, №2, 1994, "What's wrong with Sociology?" in which he wrote, "What is wrong is that sociology is incoherent. It does not cohere….While each article/book/course may be well crafted, they have little or nothing to do with each other." Yet, Davis

doesn't appear to consider using "*sociological problem*" to name or frame sociology's coherence deficit.

A criticism of sociology is its lofty pursuit of knowledge of problems and theoretical means of understanding them, sans solutions. However, just as it does in clinical physiology as an accepted branch of physiology, clinical sociology is said to be "the application of sociological theories, research/methods, and interventions to social issues and problems presented by clients. Thus, the field of **clinical sociology**…adds intervention, prevention, and social amelioration components to its framework. "Clinical" means a problem-solving perspective…Some sociologists prefer the term "sociological practice" or "applied sociology." Others refer to it as "doing sociology." (*Wiley Online Library*) But, "*sociological practice*" is defined, oddly enough, as resolving *social problem*s rather than *sociological problems*.

Yes, despite the "doing" aspect of clinical sociology, Professor Monica Prasad (2018) seems to concur with Davis' assessment on the matter of field coherence, saying, "But the methodological lessons of successful problem-solving sociology have not yet been organized in a coherent manner. For that reason, attempts to study social problems often fall into three common traps…**Trap 1:** Describing and Complaining Rather than Solving; **Trap 2:** Studying the

Victims Rather Than The Villains; **Trap 3:** Critiquing Other Solutions Rather than Providing New Solutions." Yet, not a word about qualifying this issue with the practice as an example of a *sociological problem."* ("*Problem-Solving Sociology" Monica Prasad, 1 Northwestern University, American Sociological Association 2018 DOI: 10.1177/0094306118779810 http://cs.sagepub.com*)

Kristen Schilt gives a near-miss on both counts in the book "*Other, Please Specify — Queer Methods in Sociology*," Chapter 1 titled, "*The "Not Sociology" Problem*." Schilt uses the word "sociological" some forty times in the introduction alone, in front of dozens of nouns, including endeavor, theory, significance, certainties, concepts, and more. Describing *sociological gatekeeping* as a problem of significance in the field of sociological research, Schilt asserts, "…the dismissal of the transgender population as too small [.06% of the U.S. population] is problematic when considered alongside [small population] groups that are more readily incorporated as part of a legitimate sociological endeavor…" (p. 45)

The rub in that? Schilt calls out "*sociological gatekeepers"* for "relegating transgender research to the category of "not sociology" as it fails the test of affecting 'a significant number of people' and decries the biased

normativity, but pulls up short of referring to this as a "*sociological problem*," or even a "*sociology problem*."

The Atlantic even took a dig at "Auburn University's Sociology's Problem," with an article on problems with professional conduct involving degrees in sociology. The Atlantic characterized it as belonging to the realm of ethics, not as a *sociological problem*, despite the ties to the school's Sociology Department.

The late Amos Nelson Wilson, Ph.D., a noted theoretical psychologist, *social theorist*, Pan-African thinker, scholar, author, and professor of psychology at the City University of New York, extensively lectured on social issues. (*Gratitude to Paul Brown for the reference to Wilson's works.*) In his representative lecture, "The Falsification of Afrikan Consciousness."

In over four hours of multiple lectures and speeches, Dr. Wilson expounds in-depth on a ranging consideration from a multidisciplinary perspective on the experience and condition of the Pan-African diaspora. He uses the terms *social*, *socialized*, *socialization, problem(s)*, *psychological, ideological, and more.* Dr. Wilson completes ten rounds of verbal sparring without using *sociological* or *sociological problem(s).* The absence

seems especially conspicuous in segments that lend themselves to large-group macro-level, existential problem-filled sociological history.

The promising chapter title, "On Being Sociological," leads to author Steve Matthewmann's in-depth discussion of how to "be sociological," using that word frequently. He only once uses the term "problems," yet commits the typical and tantalizing near-miss, veering left to use "sociology's *problems*" in that single occurrence on page five in his excellent chapter of the book *"Being Sociological" (Publisher: Macmillan International Higher Education*).

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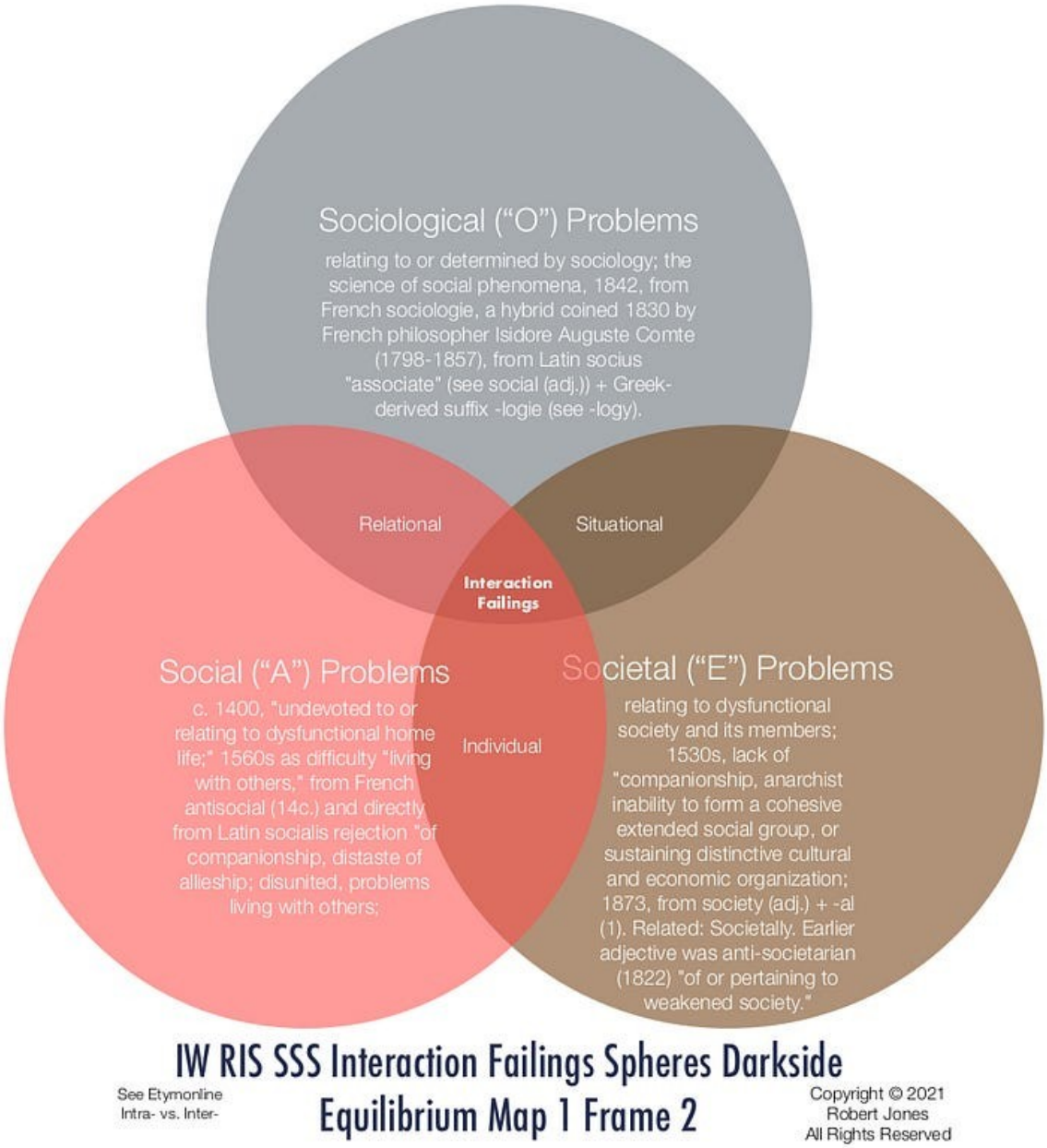

InclusiveWorks LLC — Sociological Interactional Spheres in Equilibrium

Therein lies the conundrum. The criticisms of Prasad and Davis appear to fall within the class of ***basic problems of sociology***. Sociology is limping along on a less than pure

differentiation between problems that are social, problems that are societal, problems that are sociological, viewing them against the backdrop of the problems of *the science of sociology itself*.

Yet, even when clear opportunities appear in which the term "*sociological*" can apply to pertinent large-scale *problems*, sociology's practical critics *and* critical theorists seem to avert their eyes from the specific conceptual classification of *sociological problems*. In the case of Kertzer, D. I. (1983), "Generation as a Sociological Problem" (*Annual Review of Sociology*, *9*, 125–149. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2946060), the term "generation" is given an exhaustive consideration, but the term "sociological problem" is used without context and exclusively in the title of the article.

Otherwise, the term appears to be used by whim or accident in discourse in the literature. Use of it often lacks contextual reference to its meaning, with no way within their thematic problem contexts to differentiate sociological from social or societal, either within the field or in application to our global society's institutions.

Outside the field of sociology, the use of '*sociological problem*' applies to social problems. Inside the sociology

field, '*sociological problem'* is often applied to almost nothing specifically or anything in general. That's problematic.

It gets stranger.

PART V. FINDING FLORIAN ZNANIECKI THROUGH A "HOLE IN SCIENCE"

It wasn't easy to find Polish-born American immigrant Florian Witold Znaniecki (January 15, 1882 — March 23, 1958). The revered scholar served as the 44th President of the American Sociological Association. His ASA Presidential Address, "Basic Problems of Contemporary Sociology," was delivered on September 8, 1954, at the Association's Annual Meeting in Urbana, Illinois, later published in the *American Sociological Review* (ASR October 1954 Vol 19 No 5, pp 519–524). His tour de force was initiating an ambitious project of systematizing sociological knowledge, just one of the lauded sociologist's significant contributions. He was no sociological slouch.

Znaniecki produced seminal sociological work on the topic, captured in a monograph, "*What Are Sociological Problems?*" Incredibly, though, when searching ASAnet.org for the term "*sociological problem*," references to their own 44th President's works don't show up at all in their archive. That seems odd, given that his bio is the first hit on the ASA

site when searching on his name alone. Maybe it's something to do with the number 44. We'll see.

Concerning the concept of the *sociological problem*, without revealing what prompted his realization, he relates, "I became aware of my own ignorance as to what a sociological problem is, after many years during which I unreflectively presumed that sociologists — including myself — knew all they needed to know about it." (*p. 25*) Someone might have asked him, perhaps one of his students. As was everyone else in the field, he admits to blithely employing the term throughout his career and studies with barely the faintest idea of what he or anyone else meant by it. Given his stature and status, his admission was a jaw-dropping display of personal and professional humility.

In the monograph, "*What Are Sociological Problems*," Znaniecki proceeds with care and clarity, soaring above the clouds of social sciences to weave the logic for conceptual framing of the *sociological problem*. He writes, "Because we are following here the lead of those sociologists who have cooperated in trying to build sociology as strictly a theoretical science," he says, "we must definitely limit the topic of this discussion. We deal only with those problems which arise when sociologists try to increase, to systematize, or to standardize theoretic knowledge of social data and not

with those which statesmen, lawyers, administrators, moralists, educators, social reformers, or social workers raise when attempting (or counteracting attempts) to influence practically social data. In short, we distinguish between *sociological problems* and *social problems* and confine our attention to the former." (p. 34)

That points *sociological problems* toward the bailiwick of sociological theoretical scholars. Toward further framing the meaning, Znaniecki dissects the field into relevant parts, drawing quite the technical map of the science of sociology along the way toward both describing the *sociological problem concept* and insinuating upon a few of such problems as vying for the attention of sociological theoreticians.

That is almost consistent with the idea that "**Sociologists** focus on **society** as a whole or large groups within **society**, not exclusively large numbers of people," and the underlying assumption seems to be that change as problem-solving isn't possible *at scale*. "They study patterns of behavior and how they shape the world around us…In contrast, **social** psychologists focus on individuals and how **social** factors impact behavior." ("Evaluation," James R. Sanders, Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology, p. 1498).

At least they *used to* focus on individuals. We'll address that later.

Using *sociological methods* to research *sociological patterns* seems to make sense. Wouldn't it seem logical, then, that such methodical research should naturally identify sociological problems *and* discover *sociological solutions*?

In theory, yes.

In the nontheoretical world, not surprisingly, the use of the bracketed term "*sociological solutions*" is clearly in play but still relatively rare if measured by 'exact match' search engine results. It is consistently applied to practical methods and approaches to solving or at least addressing pressing social problems. The use of "sociological problems" juxtaposed with "sociological solutions" tends to follow the contemporary definitional pattern of devolving to social problems rather than high-level theory. How can that be bridged?

In "Social Theory and Social Structure" (*Merton, Robert K., New York: The Free Press, 1968 Enlarged Edition [**Full PDF**], Chapter II, On Sociological Theories of the Middle Range*), Merton therein refers to *sociological problems* as existing at three sociological levels of analysis, micro (*at*

which level he interestingly includes work teams as a small group social structure — and rest assured we'll come back to that in Sociological Safety™ discussions), middle-range [meso], and macro. In most cases, Merton uses the term in connection with data representing challenging *social problems* rather than problems in or with the field of sociology.

Consistent with scholarly sociology, Merton's rendition of the sociological problem remained tethered to the theoretical realm. He described "a good sociological problem" as "one that has significant implications for theory" and "to learn what constitutes an apt theoretical solution to the problem." That looked promising. On the whole, however, Merton remained aloof from direct engagement in *problem-solving instead of collecting and analyzing* data on observed problematic social phenomena and formulating a new theory.

He cited a Znaniecki-style sociological problem of incoherence among proliferating frameworks, concepts, and even taxonomies in the field, relating that "almost all the pioneers in sociology tried to fashion his own system. The multiplicity of systems, each claiming to be the genuine sociology, led naturally enough to the formation of schools, each with its cluster of masters, disciples and epigoni." [*Yeah, I had to go to the dictionary for that one.*] Merton

fretted, “Sociology not only became differentiated with other disciples, but it became internally differentiated.”

In the book, Merton adeptly walked the scholarly tightrope, raising alluring examples of problematic *social matters* such as government bureaucracy, inequity in military promotion opportunities, housing communities’ phenomena, social class differences and status, socio-organizational features that militate against technological progress, and others.

However, Merton’s “*problematization*” frame is that each of the specific practical *social problems* was characterized by the need for theoreticians to clearly define the specific underlying sociological denominators (what he termed “the common residual”) which *constitute the case* by which to define a narrow theoretical criterion, then by which to better *understand* the problems, but not necessarily to *solve* them. Throughout “Social Theory and Social Structure” Merton repeatedly describes in varying terms the serendipitous emergence of an ‘*anomalous, unexpected, sociologically problematical, strategic* ***datum*** *that creates pressure for initiating, or gives rise to, new social theory*.’

Per Oxford Bibliographies: “**Social theory** refers to ideas, arguments, hypotheses, thought-experiments and explanatory speculations about how and why human societies

— or elements or structures of such societies — come to be formed, change, and develop over time or disappear."

This has gotten pretty far into the weeds and woods of sociology, but what Merton seems to be saying is that any good sociological theory well-investigated will eventually produce "inexplicable datum" that in turn produces new theories and speculation. What Grathhoff opined as Professor Emeritus in the Department of Sociology at Bielefeld University, Germany is then more clearly understood when he said, "Sociological problems may arise in practical fields, they may be of social origin, but they are always a case for the "theoretical scientist."

Merton lost me on that one. If a sociological datum bears the possibility of being an individual social human being, the idea of being inexplicable becomes problematic. (Bloch, H. A. (1943). A Synthetic View of the Social Individual as a Primary Datum in Sociology. *American Sociological Review*, *8*(5), 499–512. https://doi.org/10.2307/2085718) By definition, the practical aspects of something involve real situations and events. Rather than only ideas and theories, the work of the practical field involves matters concerned with actual use or practice. Was he trying to have it both ways? Or, perhaps his meaning of "arise" was "emerge" or "be discovered" after which the *sociological problems* are elevated out of and

beyond the practical work of any field (like psychology, or safety), in effect, informing and becoming a part of sociological theory…where it is then lost forever.

In any case, Prasad is thereby validated by Grathhoff and Merton in that, as she wrote, “In sociology today a scholar could solve the problem of genocide, and someone would say, “*yes, but what is this a case of?*” The urge to “theorize” — to pull out general implications from a specific situation, to see the universe in the grain of sand — is deeply rooted in our discipline and assumed as a requirement of scholarly publication.” She clearly sees the *sociological problem* of sociology’s sequestration in the theoretical realm as asymptotic to the sociological solution.

PART VI. BAILING SOCIOLOGICAL WATER

The most puzzling find regarding the question “What are sociological problems?” came from an article of that title by George A. Lundberg (Bennington College, American Sociological Review, Vol. 6, №3 (June 1941), pp. 357–369). The article’s content was aimed clearly and squarely at defining sociological problems as *epistemological and methodological problems within the field of sociology itself,* and sociology’s failure of empiricism. Lundberg’s journal submission plays to arguments over the last Century as to whether sociology and other social science branches

are true sciences, published perhaps not coincidentally when computers and predictive analytics and then business analytics began to emerge in the mid-20th Century.

Where other sciences used namesake problems to describe the conditions, disorders, dysfunctions, and maladies they sought to solve, treat, or cure, the sociology profession has seemingly chosen to use its own scientific *sociological moniker* as the discipline's term of art for its own failings. Lundberg clarifies that. Rather than characterizing the failures as an empiricism problem, an epistemological problem, or an objective methodological problem, formal sociology and its most esteemed members of that time described themselves and their work practices as *sociological problems.*

Znaniecki's sentiments about the field's sociological problems aligned with Lundberg's in that respect, though not perfectly. Empiricism wasn't at all Znaniecki's bone of contention. Instead, he devoted a considerable amount of ink, shared in "What Are Sociological Problems", to what could be called sociological misdirection. He likened much of the research to shooting sociological fish in a barrel. Sociologists can scientifically hook and reel in systemic discrimination against minorities and women by dropping a line in the water wherever there are minorities and women.

Such scholarly fishing expeditions won't likely land any new species of discrimination or disparity. The question is rarely, if ever, whether discrimination is there to be found. The question is always what to do about it once you reel it in.

In Znaniecki's mind, the technical statistical, mathematical, and analytical methods weren't at issue. His concern was the sustained use of them to chase low-hanging fruit. Concerning the findings of most of the research of American sociologists, he averred, "Undoubtedly, many of these studies have either reached or probably will reach *valid sociological or sociopsychological conclusions*. Unfortunately, the significance of these conclusions for the advancement of sociology as a general science is limited… Most of the investigators are concerned only with what is occurring within the relatively narrow field of their research during the time while the research is going on. They ignore the enormous multiplicity and complexity of social phenomena developing on the national scale, the continental scale, and the worldwide scale, as well as the historical background of these phenomena. They seem to be unaware that the most urgent task of sociologists is to investigate these phenomena *and find some solutions* for the pressing practical problems which they involve."

That is, although the studies of social problems were scientifically valid, what he characterized as “striving for methodological perfection,” Znaniecki deemed the work as a whole deficient, unhelpful in this one other critical respect, saying, “…the further development of sociology as a science and the possibility of its effective application to contemporary social problems depend on their solution” of *sociological problems*. In his 1954 address to ASA, Znaniecki expressed the grave concern that in the absence of solving the most critical *sociological problem*s of his day, “sociology itself may disappear completely, as it has behind the Iron Curtain.”

Fortunately for the field of sociology, only the “*sociological problem”* concept has been “vanished” instead of the whole science or the scientists — so far. But not before Znaniecki managed to get the term *sociological problem* officially written into the ASA record. Under the banner of “basic problems of contemporary sociology,” his explication that American Sociology, as well as French and British Sociology, were effectively missing the point of their own existence as a science. That seems to be both a sociological *and* a sociology problem.

“I do not claim that I have solved any of the *sociological problems* mentioned here,” Znaniecki admitted without

listing any of them. “But I insist that they must be solved, not only for the advancement of sociology as a science but also to enable social leaders to collaborate in planning and promoting culture creativeness and the social integration of humanity in order to prevent cultural destruction and social disintegration.” (*American Sociological Review, Official Journal of the American Sociological Society*, Vol. 19, №5, October 1954, p. 524.)

That sounds dire enough, but it didn’t inspire the ASA or even Znaniecki himself as President to put forward an initiative to flesh out a definition or a definitive fix. ASA made no push to define it, nor suggested categorical way(s) of closing that breach or repairing the grammatical incongruence. Znaniecki instead attempted to develop an elaborate and ingenious intellectual workaround that, in retrospect, momentarily restored and elevated *sociological problems* to at least some semblance of coherent usage in the science. Then, it apparently petered out again somewhere after the 1950s. To put it mildly, the passage of time hasn’t diminished the veracity of Znaniecki’s concerns.

For example, those mentioned above, Grathoff, Merton, Davis, Islam, Prasad, shared Znaniecki’s concern over a persisting problem of sociology, which he clearly expressed in the 1930s, regarding the coherence deficit in sociological

materials, and a related issue with anemic sociological theory. In his characteristically unvarnished manner, Znaniecki wrote, “Sociology…is only beginning to learn how to make proper use of its material, which is being agglomerated at a tremendous rate. While many older sociologists on a slender foundation of fact built imposing speculative constructions, which crumbled down before they were finished, we are heaping up mountains of raw stuff and barely manage to raise on top of them small and unsightly shreds of timid theory. We dignify this procedure by ascribing it to scientific circumspection, whereas in most cases it is nothing but plain incapacity to do any better.” (*The Method of Sociology*, Chapter IV, The Sources of Sociological Material (p. 134), 1934, Rinehart & Company, Inc. New York) Is the incoherence a sociological problem, a problem of sociology, or a symptom of a problem of another kind?

Abraham Lincoln famously referred to The Republic as “government *of* the people, *by* the people, *for* the people,” while Znaniecki, Lundberg, and others used the term *sociological problem*, likely traceable back to well before Hagar (1905), to classify the failings of sociology in a Lincolnesque way, as ‘basic problems ***of*** sociology, methodological approach problems ***by*** the sociologists, and an existential problem ***for*** the science.’ Znaniecki placed the

onus for solving *sociological problem*s squarely on the shoulders of sociologists.

I get that. It's linguistically rational but surprising in the terminological context of other sciences. But it's what sociology has done. It may explain why that perfectly good term of sociological nomenclature "*sociological problem(s)*" has become a professional artifact that sociologists have tacitly elected to leave buried, to the extent possible, unless they see no alternative, using it only rarely in polite company. It's not difficult to see why.

Imagine the scenario of the next Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (APA) in which its President as the keynote speaker concluded with the dire warning, "It appears our profession and its practitioners have existential *psychological problems*, and we must address and resolve them for our profession and for the good of humanity." Without much explanation, it would be gravely misunderstood (*maybe*), and deeply disconcerting to patients/clients of the services of psychologists and psychiatrists worldwide. The equivalent case would be if the whole of physiologists were deemed to have become physiologically dysfunctional by their own hands. To say the least, both professions would suffer a bit of a credibility dilemma, not to mention the newspaper headlines.

That presents a plausible (but not an official) explanation for the otherwise inexplicable and pervasive terminological switcheroo, with "*sociological problems*" fading from general use and morphing into mundane categories via adjectives of "social" and "societal" problems in the sociological sciences literature and in the day-to-day tightly constrained "praxis" of sociology.

PART VII. The Sociological Lacuna

People still desperately seek and openly plead for safe interaction within and between groups, cultures, nations, and societies, while grappling with the unyielding intrusion of troublesome institutional influences. That was true before the invention and introduction of sociology in the mid-1800s. But like sociologists themselves, the global polity appears to be completely unaware of the now-defunct use of the word "*sociological problem*" in framing, analyzing, and discussing dysfunctional human interaction, its causations, or the solutions.

A marvelous example can be seen in Prof. Manuel DeLanda's quite ingenious book, "*A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*." (New York, 2005) (Thanks to Kenneth Tyler for pointing me toward this book.) The theory is named after an art form pioneered by

Pablo Picasso in the early 1900s. It centered on making art from trash.

Assemblage Transformation: Trash to Jewelry

One particular feature is its representations of 3-dimensional objects in space. Analogizing Assemblage for theorizing ways of representing human social issues, Manuel DeLanda sets out to create a reference frame by extracting philosophical nuggets from concepts and ideas dispersed throughout the works of philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. He analogically draws what he calls “a novel approach to social ontology.” Social ontology means a way of describing social systems and their problems that shows their properties and the relations between them. He’s done so by stringing together ideas from physics, philosophy, and sociology.

The word *sociological* appears in DeLanda’s book a scant three times, exclusively in the endnotes of the book in

citations related to sociological theory, sociological phenomena, and sociological method. That's not surprising, as the title gives no specific reason to expect it in a discussion of social ontology. Throughout DeLanda's work, however, there are opportune lead-ins for reference to the conceptual *sociological problem*.

For example, DeLanda discusses a seldom recognized "*recalcitrant problem of the linkages between the macro and the micro [that] has resisted solution for decades because it has been consistently badly posed,*" (p. 70) further remarking there and much earlier in his book, "Assemblage theory can help to frame the problem correctly, thus clearing the way for its eventual solution — a solution that will involve giving the details of every mechanism involved." (p. 31) This is a case of Professor DeLanda *problematizing problem statements* to which he applies Assemblage theory as a way of structuring them.

Without delving into it here, DeLanda early on engaged in differentiating between mind-independent and mind-dependent realities. In short, it's a classification of things that exist because we thought them into existence, as opposed to things that have been and will be in existence whether we are here or not, or whether we are cognizant of them or not. In that sense, human social, societal, and

institutional issues have a precarious standing. The more abstract those issues might be, the more dependent on our minds to sustain them. That’s the philosophical case for what we recognize as problems.

Some problems can be fully resolved by changing our minds about a thing, altering our perception. On the other hand, failing to recognize and acknowledge the reality of a thing when it is mind-independent is more a case of denial than anything else.

Sir Isaac Newton recognized the existence of an object that he named gravity, which literally meant “weight, heaviness, pressure.” Gravity certainly didn’t come into existence when he came to perceive it from a scientific perspective. He recognized that gravity wasn’t an abstraction, and that its existence doesn’t depend at all on what we think of it or even whether we think of it. So gravity and gravitation fall into the category of mind-independence. Gravity shifts into the problem category only when we seek to defy it or overcome it. The meanings of mind-independence and mind-dependence aren’t quite that cut and dried for everything, but from that example, we can readily see how objects and the related systems of thought around those objects can diverge into the two different systems of problems and problem-solving.

DeLanda’s efforts to systematize social-societal problem statement development may actually constitute a case for a reprise of the quest for the *sociological* unicorn. He recognizes that somewhere in the space between social theory and social programmatic practice lies the crucial task of surfacing and, most importantly, properly framing problems at a high level, as the absence of so doing usually precludes solutions.

With respect to *sociological problems*, Florian Znaniecki similarly proposed the step of *problematization (*simply, *“knowing how to put a problem”)* as crucial. The pervasive need for doing so may very well be the first (and likely the easiest) *sociological problem* to solve in every case of a specific problem in a theoretical realm. DeLanda proposes the Assemblage theory to be just such a step at the social level, at least theoretically*, but without a prohibition from intellectually crossing the line into nontheoretical territory in search of solutions.*

Znaniecki walked right up to that line for years, his scholarly wrestlings likely having been prolonged by his attempt to respect the profession’s protocol of problematization at the purely theoretical level. The reason for the failure to coalesce theory around the *sociological problem* and its problematization may be more apparent now than ever.

DeLanda’s effort to coalesce the work of Deleuze and Guattari around Assemblage Theory emerges at a time when real-world social and societal subsystems are more than ever pushing against sociology’s professional constraints at theoretical boundaries.

In the early days of this push, Florian Znaniecki presciently wrote, “The traditional lines of cultural evolution are changing with an astonishing rapidity; new currents are appearing whose direction we are unable to calculate and whose power we only begin to suspect. Do these changes imply some wonderful future progress or are they the symptoms of an incipient disorganization similar to that of the Dark Ages? The old and established types of cultural investigation give us no methods for the understanding of the present in its bearing upon the future. Nor do they help us to decide what we should do in order to influence this future in accordance with our aspirations, in order to incorporate our highest ideals into the cultural reality which is evolving under our very eyes. It seems to me, therefore, the duty of all intellectual workers to concentrate their efforts for years to come upon problems whose solution may give the statesman and the moral reformer, the practical economist and the educator, the religious idealist and the artist, instruments with which to foster cultural progress.”

That “lacuna,” as Znaniecki called it, requires overcoming the dread of conjecture, “a tentative assumption of the existence of some particular object or the occurrence of some particular fact.” Something quite different than a hypothesis, “every conjecture is based on analog. If we find a social system otherwise similar to some system we already know, but with some element seemingly missing which the latter poses, we conjecture that this element is there too, but has escaped observation or not been reported in description, for we presume that otherwise, the whole system would be different.”

Znaniecki’s implication is that there’s a place for theory, but generally not aboard sinking ships. There’s a point at which something has to be abandoned, like definitions of professionalism that preclude filling the gap between the notion of professional thinking and the practical professional methods deployed in the field under conditions of complexity. Znaniecki’s theoretical approach led him to recognize the existence of and critical need for a transformational space, a middle-range, a non-scientific type of *vertically integrated sociological problematization* that goes beyond even Mertonesque experimentalism to transform theory into effective practice.

That place is one in which the best minds in sociology aren't of necessity frozen on the sidelines, constrained by theoretical scholarship and instrumental professionalism, but instead, and at the very least, sending in plays from the sidelines, purposefully working through the practical problems on the real-world field of play. Sociology probably doesn't need a newer Theory of Action to reshape the divergence between research and theory. Sociology needs a conduit *between* theory and action.

The capstone of the InclusiveWorks investigation into the push against sociology's theoretical restraints came in a work by Stephen Lyng and David D. Franks, "*Sociology and the Real World*" (2002, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.). It is not at all common to see such a cogent critique of sociology coupled with a systematic blueprint for bringing a new coherence and relevance to the science of sociology. Added to that, the entire book is remarkably accessible to the layman, in stark contrast to most sociological literature that seems to compete for unintelligibility to nonsociologists.

Lyng & Franks center squarely on the glaring absence of meaningful stepwise methodological linkages to cascade knowledge through the stage of objective problematization, theorization, achieving normative and factual consensus about social problems and *identifying creative, well-reasoned*

alternative solutions. That would include, as practical researchers might expect, in-stream sociological monitoring and feedback loops as solutions are tested.

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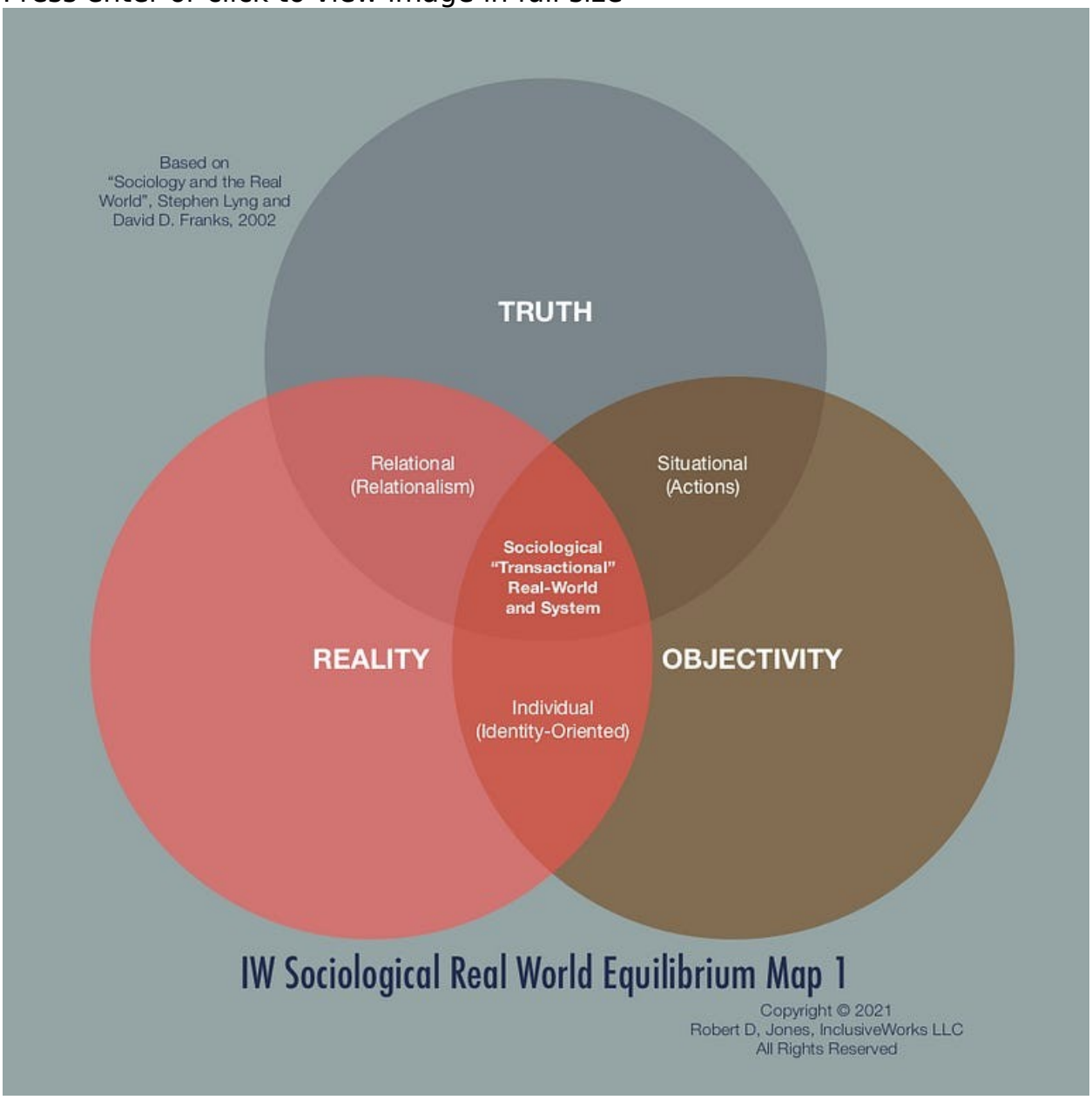

InclusiveWorks LLC Summary Representation of a Transactional "Real World" based on Stephen Lyng and David D. Franks, "*Sociology and the Real World*" (2002, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.)

Lyng and Franks' succinct critique is aimed at "the case that sociological theory needs, and does not have, a link to the real, i.e., corporeal world," a result of succumbing to what Konrad Lorenz observed about Western thought: "Reflection, man's greatest discovery in the history of the human mind, was immediately followed by the greatest and gravest mistake, that of doubting the reality of the real world." ("Behind the Mirror", 1977)

That doubt finds its expression in sociology through what the authors argue is an entrenched and paralyzing academic reticence toward using the terms *objectivity, reality, and truth,* viewed by elite philosophical sociology as having tenuous legitimacy in an imagined "real world." Thus, the rationalized incapacity to achieve any of those three ethically precludes translation of theory into real-world application. Sociologists ignore the corporeal world rather than risk fatally flawed intervention, leaving sociologists engaged in academic voyeurism around the affairs of humankind.

Relying on biological analogy, Lyng & Franks go so far as to characterize the state of sociology as a "disembodied" head buoyed by theories, but without a body of earthly praxis, floating somewhere well above the corporeal world. The goal of their Transactional Sociology framework is "*making the notion of corporeal transaction the conceptual linchpin of the*

model." The authors propose a "recoupling" of the head full of sociological theory sewn onto a corporeal body of counterinductive sociological praxis.

The trouble with the real world is that it ultimately recoils in horror at attempts to corporealize pure scientific theories by means of experimentation on humans as if a Frankensteinian sociological monstrosity, angry villagers, torches, pitchforks, and all. Yet, Lyng &Franks' assertion is that the sociological enterprise ignores connecting itself to corporeal reality at the risk of irrelevance and obsolescence. That, however, is precisely that from which academic sociologists have historically recoiled. It's a dilemma that sounds like a *sociological problem*.

Despite it all, and in its entirety, the authors, contributors, influencers, and editors of *Sociology and the Real World,* one and all, completely circumvent the term "*sociological problem.*" Even their near misses glance off of sociology's methods and ricochet toward the madness of an aloof purely ethereal theorization as the substantive sociological problem in a corporeal world.

PART VIII. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

To borrow a phrase from the energy industry, the idea here is making the *sociological problem* a "used and useful" term

of science. There's no doubt it's been used. Whether it has been useful is a separate matter. Toward answering the question "What are sociological problems?" it must be slightly reframed to read, "What is the right definition of *sociological problems* for the 21st Century?" There is likely no more convincing evidence of that than the monograph, "*What Are Sociological Problems: Florian Znaniecki*." It is an incredible journey of insight into the peering mind and sociological imagination of Znaniecki, and the early challenges of the discipline of sociology over the course of his career and lifetime.

The InclusiveWorks® foray into the topic of the *sociological problem* might be treated as introducing a 'motion in amendment' on the matter, "to retrieve and restore the big concept of the *sociological problem."* We aren't inventing it. It isn't new. It's merely been forgotten or misplaced, and likely needs to be reinvented and polished up, at least from what we can tell from the outside.

The *sociological problem* wouldn't be the exclusive category of safety issues. Physical, psychoemotional, and social safety are already well-established and well-positioned, each bearing its own respective class of safety problems to be managed and solved. But there's a role for the sociological problem and sociological safety well beyond sociology. The

sister social science of Psychology, for example, is presently in the throes of an internal adjustment that at the very least coincides with the sociological problem, and certainly plays directly to ***sociological safety***. American Medical Association (AMA) had its turn in the *sociological safety* introspection arena for its member doctors a few years ago, as well.

Human safety issues within sociology are only one of quite a few obvious spaces via which the *sociological problem concept* can potentially pull into a huddle under its umbrella. That is, provided that the social science(s) can at least draw dotted lines around the used and useful meaning(s) of the *sociological problem* as a *class of problems* that Znaniecki tantalizingly traced out on paper more than a half-century ago.

Whether the problems are individual, social, societal, institutional, or *sociological*, if we lack the language to clearly express the problem, the solving is doomed. The loss of the term *sociological problem* may well have hobbled the language of sociology, like losing a ball mid-game. The type of ball identifies the game. The axiom “Keep your eye on the ball” is useless if we cannot identify the nature of the ball. We won’t know what to do (the rules) when we see it. The axiom, “You can’t hit what you can’t see” means that

swinging at, defining, or solving *sociological problems* can't be done in linguistic darkness. The type of problem identifies the approach, methods, tools, and techniques for solutions. Sociologists do a great job of keeping their eye on the problems. They just don't swing at it, kick it, or run with it.

There are professional "futurists" continually examining sociology's paradigm and metaparadigms, projecting the effects of an array of widely differing sociological ideas being implemented, as did Znaniecki, each idea being proposed de facto as a way to shift sociology's paradigm, address "sociological problems" and save us from ourselves, individually or collectively.

Today, what would a five-page speech entitled, "Basic Problems of Contemporary Sociology" sound like? Has the time come to train sociology's futurist telescopes on '*The Case of the Missing Sociological Problem'* and the "hole" it has left in the social sciences? Let's hope so.

Do we have the technologies in place to innovate in sociology, to move beyond 20th Century classic sociological approaches? You bet your **ASAnet.o**rg we do. Models exist today for hypothesizing and building unified global ***theor****y* and quickly conducting experimental testing at scale, incorporating sound, principled methods of social

science toward piecing together the puzzle. Prasad cites *problem-solving sociology* as being “more likely to lead to theoretical innovation,” as “trying to solve the problem demands engagement with the most basic and the biggest questions of social science, and often requires furthering social theory.” We’re better than ever at doing that at scale. Importantly, the field of analytics is on fire. The new highly sophisticated techniques that can be applied to problems of a properly attributed sociological nature will benefit from the ability to collect and synthesize once unimaginable amounts of narrative and data.

That said, *the problem is the problem*, and a new, unified understanding of the sociological problem could indeed go a long way toward furthering both *social and sociological theory*. The definition question cannot be a sociologically self-serving matter of making the world safer for sociologists. The question at hand is whether academic and professional sociology has *the political will* to innovate. While this review of the literature isn’t meant as an endorsement of any of the concepts, approaches, or techniques proposed by those cited herein, it does point to a central and important matter for this century.

Central to any contemporary meaning of “the *sociological problem”* has to be the contemporary definition of

sociological scholarship. Without questioning sociology's future existence, does the contemporary definition of scholarship constrain or even neutralize the scientific and social value of the science of sociology and put its relevance at risk? Is the sociological imagination stymied when it comes to the idea of kicking the tripwires at the border of theoretical tradition to risk engagement with actual sociological *problem-solving*?

The answers may have to come from outside of sociology.

It's a given that "sociological" as used with "safety" has parallels in other venues. Noted legal scholar, Donald Black, put forward a parallel concept in his book "Sociological Justice. He "introduces what was once a new and promising field of legal scholarship that will have important consequences for the future of law: the sociology of the case." (*Sociological Justice*, Donald Black, Oxford University Press USA, 1989, 1993)

Black never mentions *sociological problem(s).* He cites examples of how sociological knowledge and data have practical applied value in what he terms "*sociological litigation*" as it relates to addressing problematic due process. Black then — in a typical near-miss — characterizes "*the law as a social problem*" (p. 96) in which sociological

considerations like *situational* realities, the *relational* distance of adversaries, and *legal individualism* have a direct and unavoidable bearing on legal outcomes. He makes the case that the sociology of law must be accounted for in legal structures and in sociological litigation's strategy, practice, prediction, and the carriage of justice in the discrete case as well as classes of cases.

More recently, others are concluding that sociology is a legitimate field of play for multiple aspects of law and jurisprudence. Benjamin van Rooij and Adam Fine argue that a "*behavioral jurisprudence*" approach would more effectively take into account the reaching sociological effects of law. Given that sociology involves the study of group life and the social forces that affect human behavior, Rooij and Fine echo Black in the recognition of sociology as a potential major contributor to the realm of law.

In their article, "Behavioral Jurisprudence: Law Needs a Behavioral Revolution," they assert, "…for law to fulfill its function, it cannot simply react to harmful behavior after it occurs; it must reduce and prevent it *ex ante*. The law must move beyond understanding how to respond to the singular case and shift to investigating law's effects on a large range of future cases to prevent harm in the first place. This requires an understanding of the science of human behavior

and integrating it into the process of creating legislation. It is time for a behavioral revolution in the field of law."

No fan of classic sociology, however, Black observes that "Unlike older sciences such as physics and biology, sociology has never had a revolution." That alone is far from justification for a revolt, nor is it all by itself evidence of the need for one. However, when viewed through the lens of a Thomas Kuhn-style scientific paradigm, the nonexistent sociological paradigmatic shift over the course of more than a century during which the entire world itself has experienced manifold wrenching changes, nothing less than revolutions on virtually every level since 1914, Black's observation of static sociology is a strong insinuation of an impure and stagnant science, contaminated by other sciences, with a reticence to cleaning it up. It's a troubling implication.

"Modern sociology is," he purports, "still classical-largely psychological, teleological, and individualistic — and even less scientific than classical sociology." That particularly means that classical vs. modern was no sociological paradigm shift at all, but regression. Black's "individualistic" characterization likely echoes Prasad's criticism of theorists' tendency to default to the idiographic method that myopically focuses on individual cases or events.

Black’s most concise critique is in turn criticized by others as legalistic. He argues for a branch of “pure sociology… entirely scientific and entirely uncontaminated by psychology, jurisprudence, or other sciences…contains no assumptions, assertions, or implications about the human mind or its contents, and unencumbered even by the rule of law. Pure sociology, however, is neither classical nor modern sociology. It has a new conception of social reality and a new strategy of explanation. It answers questions unasked by classical sociologists and their modern counterparts. It solves a crisis unknown to either. The crisis is that sociology is not really sociological.” That crisis to which Black refers is his implication of a *sociological problem*.

The legal perspective compelled Black’s framing that, “Law behaves according to the same principles everywhere — across all legal cases, all stages of the legal process, all societies, all times. Law obeys sociological laws.” The idea of laws goes to a nomothetic method, characterized by a search for general statements that account for larger social patterns of recurring individual cases at the social, societal, and institutional scales. Such sociological laws would, in his estimation, then necessarily provide the context of any frequency or magnitude of parallel events, behaviors, and experiences.

Black further explains pure sociology; “It completely ignores human subjectivity, the conscious and unconscious meanings and feelings people experience, including their perceptions, cognitions, and attitudes.” He goes further, but his point is that *pure sociology’s sociologists* would shun psychological explanations for a sociological phenomenon. (p. 347–348) If it’s a sociological problem, then sociology should explain it. Otherwise, psychologists can explain the phenomenon as a psychological problem.

That felt like a direct reference to Kantian impartiality and universalizability framed in the person of a “neutral observer” who injects no personal characterization or attribution of the phenomena observed of the course of human conduct and behavior, or even of the objective consequences. The only judgment is with respect to the outcome as it relates to the laws and the principles upon which they are based. In the sense that laws are in theory to be enforced even-handedly, neutral not as to the law but as to the lawbreaker, Black constructs the parallel in pure sociology.

Therefore, Black asserts that cross-contamination, i.e., answering questions from sociology by providing explanations from psychology, is anathematic to pure sociology, in the theoretical as well as praxis. He doesn’t

dispute that there are clear parallels, relationships, interrelationships, and even interactions between physiology, psychology, and sociology. "Social Safety Theory," for example, "hypothesizes that developing and maintaining friendly social bonds is a fundamental organizing principle of human behavior and that threats to social safety are a critical feature of psychological stressors that increase risk for [biological] disease."

The psychology, physiology/biology of that mashup contaminate the explanation and therefore aren't pure sociology or sociological enough for Black. For the purposes of Donald Black's sociology, connection to the psychological or the physiological for explanation is a trespass forbidden by his proposed pure sociology. It's his posted "No Psychology Zone." (The Epistemology of Pure Sociology, Donald Black, Law & Social Inquiry, Vol. 20, №3, 1995, https://www.jstor.org/stable/828807 pp. 829–870)

That may sound abstract, even nonsensical until we remember the concept of mind-independent vs. mind-dependent objects discussed earlier. "A mind-independent thing is something whose existence is not dependent on thinking/perceiving things, and thus would exist whether or not any thinking things (minds) existed." (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, George Berkely entry,

2. *Berkeley's critique of materialism in the Principles and Dialogues,* 2011)

Sociology and psychology are as different from one another as physiology and sociology. For the purposes of comparing Sociological Safety™ to Psychological Safety, it will be useful to keep that in mind. Absent manifest behavior, i.e., observable phenomena, neither the human mind nor its thoughts and beliefs can be observed or studied at all. We cannot literally "see a mind." There are idioms that imply otherwise. "I can see the wheels turning." "I love watching your mind work." "You read my mind!" "A penny for your thoughts." All, however, more directly refer to observable physical indications of a physical bearing, posture, or expression by which inference about the mental activity is generated.

In contrast, sociological phenomena can be directly observed and studied without knowing a thing about what's on the minds of the humans involved. "Thirty-one people were shot in 31 days in Baltimore in January 2022."

Thus, in Black's rationalization of psychology-independent sociology, psychology, which is centered on and in the functioning of the human mind, is automatically disqualified as a source of explanations of social, societal, institutional, or

sociological phenomena. He might likewise argue that problematic social phenomena like conflict, hunger, poverty, racism, misogyny, crime, corporate corruption, have not been nor can be legitimately classed as psychological problems.

The psychological makeup of an individual mind in tandem with and within an individual brain within an individual body in the context of a specific situation is difficult enough to infer. Ideas such as “group psychology” and “social psychology” are rooted in the idea of individual minds nested in a group or collective mind. They are inferential science. The discipline was and still is called social psychology, “the study of the manner in which the personality, attitudes, motivations, and behavior of the individual influence and are influenced by social groups.”

A “group mind” or “collective mind” isn’t directly observable any more than is the mind of an individual, and is only inferentially evidence-based. That is quite different from observable group behavior. At present, it isn’t even possible or practical to attempt to get flashes of collective brain activity captured by simultaneous fMRI readings. Psychology has literally had to straddle the physiological brain activity of individuals, extrapolate them, and differentially connect the

sociological behavioral manifestations to infer group psychological processes.

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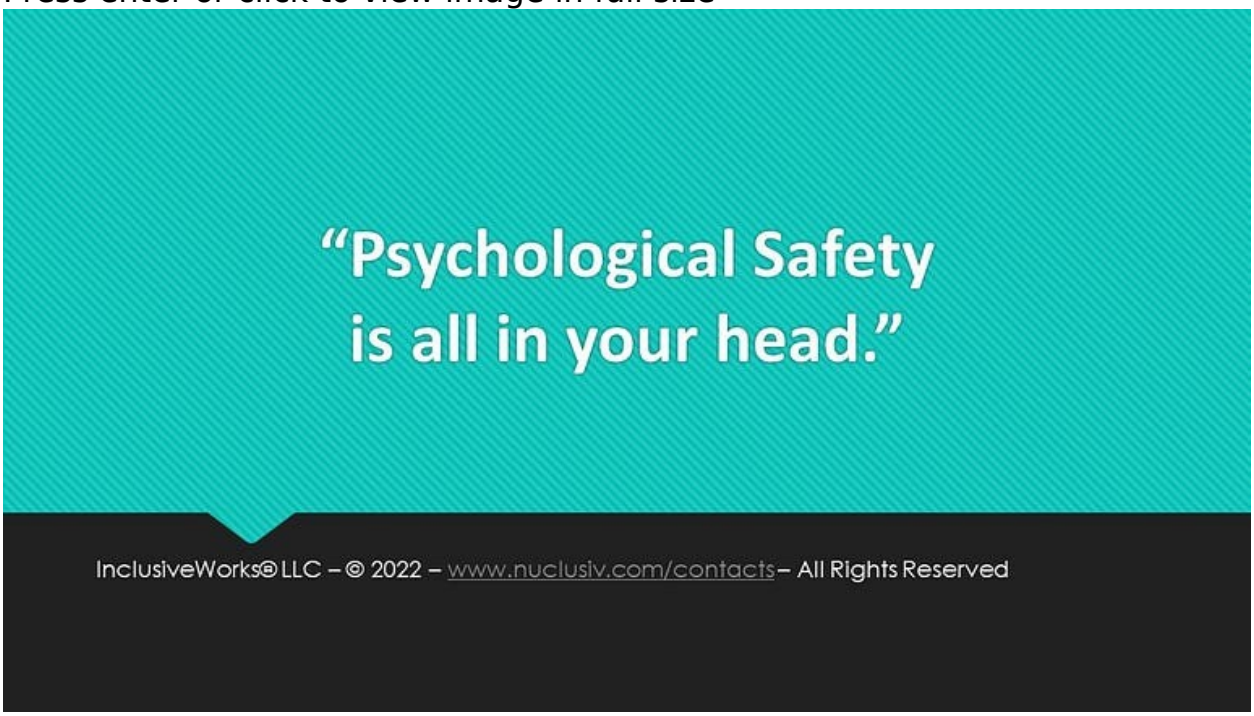

Then, the idea of a "No Psychology Zone" isn't irrational, nor even unreasonable. But it may be wishful thinking. It pushes back at fields like Social Psychology, which focuses on the influences of social situations and social interaction on human behavior, and Industrial and Organizational Psychology, which "focuses on deriving principles of individual, group and organizational/workplace behavior and applying this knowledge to the solution of problems at work." (Almost sounds like Black's "*sociological laws.*") If physiological science took Black's lead and also barred psychology, then psychology would be forced into a state of pure metaphysics.

Science abhors a vacuum. Viewed as a case of a *sociological problem*, the sociological underpinning of I/O Psych & Social Psych becomes a prime case of the proverbial nose of the psychological camel let into sociology's tent. The basis for that isn't all that complex. The differentiation between the psychological and sociological is illustrated by Edward Cary Hayes' discussion of "The Classification of Social Phenomena." (American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 17, №1 (Jul., 1911), pp. 90–118 (29 pages) Published by: The University of Chicago Press)

Hayes opens with the clear assertion, "Special social sciences like politics, jurisprudence, and economics investigate each some particular division of social reality, and if there is any science that should attempt to classify all social phenomena and chart the whole field of social reality it must be general sociology." Sounds reasonable enough.

But Hayes therein documents the wrestlings in the early days of the social sciences in parsing sociology and psychology, first arguing against a position of Professor Giddings' that, "The unit of investigation, then, in sociology is the socius-that is to say the individual who is not only an animal and a conscious mind, but also a companion, a learner, a teacher, and co-worker." Hayes counters, "The conduct of the individual is a complex and multifarious compound; each

prevalent activity in which he participates is a separate object for investigation. To speak of the socius as the ultimate unit of investigation is somewhat as if a botanist should take a bouquet as his unit of investigation…The socius is not only too complex but also too unique to be taken as the ultimate unit of investigation."

Importantly, Hayes differentiates categories of activities as phenomena in a way that reveals a more consistent grammar back then than exists today, e.g., social, political, institutional, intellectual, moral, and one we seldom see today, psychical, a word with augmented meaning today. The word "psychical" isn't lost to us. A fairly recent paper, "Psychical Work Safety, (2015)" uses the term in precisely the context of mentality in establishing interpersonal social safety at work, like psychological safety. Hayes, though, reinforces the priority of the manifest over the mental in establishing and addressing sociological climate, expressing the sentiment that "The concept of essential social realities, and ultimate problem-phenomena for sociology must be in terms of activities." (p. 117)

In Edward Cary Hayes' day, these were the types of arguing over the differences between individuals and groups as either psychological vs. sociological phenomena, and Hayes insists that "The contrast implied by the names of social and

individual psychology is an utterly false one. So-called individual psychology is better termed “general” psychology.” (p. 110) That would align with today’s disciplines of “general physiology” or “general medicine.”

Long story short, psychology won the social turf war. There is nothing called “social sociology” today. The evidence of psychology’s significant annexation of practical sociology through the *socius*-social side door is likely a direct result of sociology’s abdication of praxis and problem-solving over time. It is sociological ground that the science of psychology will almost certainly be unwilling to cede. Working on the psychological *socius* bouquet is, for example, the current undisputed turf of “psychological safety,” while *industrial sociology* and *organizational sociology* are known, but not nearly as well as their prominent cousins in psychology. Despite that, the distinctions could still prove to be a step in the right sociological correction toward Black’s pure sociology.

Black’s reasoning isn’t the inductive reasoning common to classic sociology. Yet, it’s not deductive or abductive, either, but more counter-inductive. Oxford Reference defines *“counter-induction*” as “A strategy reversing the normal logic of induction, by taking the way things are within our experience as a guide to how they will not be outside our

experience. It proves surprisingly hard to formulate a consistent counter-inductive strategy," but Oxford doesn't call counter-inductive reasoning impossible, or wrong. It does, however, share elements of Znaniecki's "analytic induction," including the case-by-case examination in the search for causation rather than mere explanation. ("*Znaniecki's Analytic Induction as a Method of Sociological Research"*, Jacques Tacq, Polish Sociological Review, №158 (2007), pp. 187–208, Published By: Polskie Towarzystwo Socjologiczne, Polish Sociological Association.)

It's no surprise that Black's logical reasoning process along with the very idea of "Sociological Law" has its detractors. (Constable, M. (1994). Thinking Nonsociologically about Sociological Law: [Rejoinder]. *Law & Social Inquiry*, *19*(3), 625–638. http://www.jstor.org/stable/828778) Sociological Law has its merits and failings, not to be argued herein. Here's what will be argued regarding Black's *psychology-free zone*.

To be perfectly honest, humans can't do anything perfectly. In the place of perfection, then, the synergies inherent in mixed-, integrated-, and multi-methods and approaches may remain our best chance of landing on our feet *in given situations*. The question is how best to do that as long as

Sociology remains preponderantly theoretical and purely explanatory.

Constable's scathing criticism of sociology insinuates that sociology has remained aloof, to its own detriment. She shakes a finger at two particular understandings, the idea that "We cannot change the world as we will (structure), yet we are free to act on our perceptions (agency)." (p. 647) Sociology has focused on explaining that world, already in place, and the human responses to it. The point in this writing holds that sticking to sociological theorizing around post facto structure (power) and agency (acts of will, the noumenal) may have been at the cost of sociology's greatest potential value, its manifest and latent *predictive capacities*.

In at least some cases, it has proven no less predictive on key social issues than Einstein's physics of gravity in the natural sciences, whether sociologists knew it or not. Unfortunately, it appears that the social science of psychology jumped the line in front of sociology on that count. The first question, though, is "Why?"

The review of the literature indicates that social scientists avoid using the term "*sociological problem*" but that doesn't factually establish that social scientists don't know that it exists, or how was meant to be used. That paradoxical

realization leads directly to a few disquieting questions about the “hole in science,” none of which show evidence of having been confronted in the sociological literature, or elsewhere.

- To whom else would sociology’s predictive value be relevant, other than an elite core of cloistered sociologists?
- Who else has in relative silence been using what theoretical sociology produces, and for what purpose?
- Whom, other than sociologists, are being influenced by the Society for the Study of Social Problems and its primary journal?
- Who else would be interested in and naturally eager to know in-depth and precisely how social problems are constructed, created, promulgated, propagated, managed, and sustained — or aborted?
- Who else has been studying, consuming, and applying sociological literary fruits if it hasn’t been primarily limited to those engaged in ground-level social initiatives to solve and end social problems?
- Who would naturally *prefer* that those who know and understand the most about the nature and complex inner workings of social, societal, and institutional

problems feel compelled by training, peer pressure, and concerns over professional standing, to remain cloistered, sequestered from the real-world application and solutions arena?

- Who benefits most from an institutionalized norm that "sociologists specializing in social-problems research do not often contribute to the public discussion of problems that afflict modern society or overtly propose solutions to them?" (*Lyng & Frank call that ironic (p. 154); but could it be something far more Machiavellian than irony?)*

Again, these are the kind of questions that make you say, "Hmmmm."

PART IX. Sociological Case: You — The Predicted Ultimate Sociological Datum

Donald Black's wondering about creating "Sociological Laws," as it turns out, is an echo of Florian Znaniecki's question, "*Are psychological laws in general possible?*" (The Laws of Social Psychology, Florian Znaniecki, Ph.D., The University of Chicago Press, 1925) Acknowledging what others of his day asserted about the subjective and inferential nature of psychology, "There can be no subjective psychological order, for all order is essentially objective…If all order is defined as being essentially objective and

psychology as dealing only with that which is essentially subjective, then of course, there can be no psychological laws by definition." (p. 2)

Eventually, though, Znaniecki works his way to an expanded response that includes things that are sociological in nature, something we might instantly recognize as pervasive in global society today. He termed it "*a sociological datum*" (p. 293) as a psychological subject, "an entity, a part of nature. He is an object among other objects *given to* the psychologist, whether as a psyche connected with a body, or as a stream of facts of consciousness accompanying physiological processes, or as a living and active organism."

He explains, "this bio-physical conception of the conscious and active subject cannot be accepted for what it claims to be, *viz.,* the purely objective, theoretic standpoint of an impersonal, rational science. In fact, it is nothing but a product of social intercourse, *a sociological datum* rather than a psychological theory. For the ultimate source of the bio-psychological entity does not lie in scientific reflection about psychological phenomena, but in the practical aspect which other human beings assume in the eyes of a subject who acts socially upon them. The conscious individual with whom modern psychology deals is originally simply the social

object…” a *sociological* object which we can readily identify today. Starting to sound familiar?

Here’s Znaniecki’s prescient reduction of that social object as a *sociological datum* in 1925, nearly 100 years ago: “Around the nucleus of his body, out of his actions and reactions as given to others, these others, i.e., the community to which he belongs, construct a social image of his personality. Since everyone is a member of some community and a social object for others, ***all human individuals are thus given primarily as social images***.”

Huh? “Social images?” Did he actually say that? Yes. And then…

“On February 4, 2004, a Harvard sophomore named Mark Zuckerberg launches The Facebook, a social media website he had built in order to connect Harvard students with one another. By the next day, over a thousand people had registered, and that was only the beginning.” (This Day In History) In 2022, if nothing else, the online social media presence/profile is “social images” of billions of online community members around the world. I don’t know if Zuck read The Laws of Social Psychology at Harvard, but I can imagine his eyes lighting up the whole dorm room if he did read that passage.

In our corporeal reality, social media and online presence are, in their truest form, the systematic conversion of each of our individual existences into a *real-time sociological datum*. It is why Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc., aren't referred to as psychological media, but social media. It is you as a *sociological datum, your social image,* in the clutches of business investors, psychologists, technologists, mathematicians, and worst of all, neuro-marketers.

Social media images aren't speculative psychological guesses about what we will do or creative analytical predictions about what we might do. It is the archival sum of our corporeal manifest behavior, appearance, choices, activities, all forming measurements that are as certain as if we were on the platform of a tailor measuring us for a suit or gown.

Znaniecki couldn't even have dreamt of *a sociological datum* collection of that scope and magnitude — maybe. Computational sociologists are only beginning to play in that arena, very late in the analytics game.

The concern is only that the predictive capacities of that kind of sociological information are being used in ways that are producing geometrically increasing dire consequences for modern society at the societal level. The bigger problem is that we don't seem to mind it so much.

Early on, this writing distinguished between *a shared belief* created by *psychical* manipulation vs. a *shared reality* in observed *sociological* interaction. The definition of a social construct is “something that exists not in objective reality, but as a result of human interaction. It exists because humans agree that it exists.” We have witnessed the ability of business-driven media organizations to generate a chemical reaction between *psychical belief* and *social reality.* It becomes an Orwellian sociological synthetic compound that could be termed *“shared understanding of a version of reality.”*

We used to have to wait quite some time for authored and published revisionist history, then buy and read it in Books 1.0. Today, those versions can now be socially constructed and administered with precision at sociological scales within periods of time ranging from a now glacial election cycle to the near lightning speed of a #hashtagged soundbite. Whether any given *shared understanding of a version of reality* runs completely counter to the objective situational facts is no longer of immediate concern.

That sociological weapon of mass distraction (i.e., *a tool that distracts the masses from thinking but predictably ignites mass visceral reaction*) is within the reach of the smallest business organizations and accessible even to individuals of

the most humble means. That may represent an unprecedented *sociological problem* in modern times, maybe even in history. Powerful artillery of that nature, essentially sociological dirty bombs, are made of materials once limited to the arsenals of governments and large religious organizations.

PART X. Sociological Case: Explicit and Implicit Discrimination

Speaking of *sociological problems and social constructs*, in another case, Social Psychologist Gordon Allport wrote the psychological thriller and smash hit "*The Nature of Prejudice*" (1954 &1988). Analyses and commentaries abound in the literature. Irwin Katz, also a psychologist of some note, acknowledged that it was a pivotal book, one of the most influential and oft-cited publications in the entire field of intergroup relations." The book, he says, "defined the field of intergroup relations for social psychologists as the study of prejudice and its effects on group interactions." Note, Katz said "its effects," not its causation.

However, Katz was also of the opinion that "Forty years of social psychological research have not provided strong support for Allport's assumption that prejudice causes discrimination, nor an explanation of the substantial long-term movement in the majority's racial sentiments and

beliefs." Add thirty more years to those statements, and they'll still hold true in 2022.

Early in this century, the tentacles of neuroscience tightened their grip around the ankles of Diversity & Inclusion practice, with some help from Psychological Safety advocates. Neuroscience held forward a promising bio-psychological avenue toward accomplishing what the social psychology of Allport couldn't. The *blind faith* afforded neuroscience by Diversity Consultants and a host of other professions led them to jump wholesale onto the "unconscious bias" bandwagon of widely rippling neuroscience influence in multiple disciplines, including bias psychology. Harvard researchers were in the lead on this and it took America by storm.

Then the wheels fell off. After decades of bias research and consultants worldwide conducting "unconscious bias training," Dr. Anthony Greenwald, a pioneer and the pinnacle of authority on bias psychology made frank, crucial observations that you won't hear the Diversity folks talking about when the subject is the psychological phenomenon named "implicit bias."

The setting was the 10th Annual Allen L. Edwards Psychology Lectures, 2015, "The Psychological Science of

Inequity and Inequality, Implicit Bias: How Should Psychological Science Inform The Law?"
Dr. Anthony Greenwald, Annual Allen L. Edwards Psychology Lectures, 2015: https://youtu.be/PluF2WluqYE (*Comments cited below begin at the 44:00 minute marker.*)

After explaining to his audience that implicit bias is only **one of many forms** of *unintentional* discrimination *(as opposed to neglectful, thoughtless, deliberate, or intentional discrimination)*, Dr. Greenwald candidly pointed out his well-researched and studied opinion, that:

- scientists and researchers *don't know how to undo implicit bias*,
- the sociopolitical and economic structures of *this system of things cannot be changed*, at least not for "many decades," such that implicit bias can be undone, *and*
- he certifies that "*Only [the] individual can change themselves* and **ONLY** if they think they need to change…"
- Some 45 minutes into his presentation, Dr. Greenwald concludes: "It's very *difficult to prevent unintended discrimination*…in order to change all these forms of Unintended Discrimination…there are things one would need to change…" but…

- **“these are things that individual people *cannot by themselves change***, and more important[ly], they’re changes that require institutional changes that *are just not about to happen*, *almost no one is motivated to do*. We are not going to undo the social status hierarchies, at least in no small number of decades, that produced accumulating disadvantages…and, unfortunately, ***we don’t yet know how to undo implicit biases,***” says Greenwald, despite decades of research and immense amounts of data.

(*Comments cited above begin at the 44:00 minute marker.*)

After 20 years of glowing promise and hope of gifting the cognitively blind with a clear vision of their blind spots, in just a few minutes, and even fewer sentences, Dr. Greenwald completely debunked any and all hope that organizational and/or mass consumption of de-biasing programs have been efficacious, despite that implicit bias research spawned the “Implicit Association Psychology” industry.

Even some neuroscientists began openly expressing their concerns. “The brain is still so much of a mystery that unless you carefully connect its activity to real-life behavior, it’s easy to think you’re gaining insight into its function

without actually getting anywhere." One team of neuroscientists explained the problem this way: "…when it comes to the brain-behavior relationship: *behavioral work provides understanding*, whereas neural interventions test causality." They assert that fMRI imaging simply doesn't connect the fact of neurons firing to any *meaningful explanations* of human behavior. (NEUROSCIENCE FEB. 28, 2017 "Why Some Neuroscientists Are Fed Up With Neuroscience.")

"Carefully connect [the brain's] activity to real-life behavior" implies sociology, starting with that "social image" at the individual level. Dr. Greenwald characterized the barriers to the fix as the more powerful social, societal, and sociological realities making discrimination immune to psychological repair. "The most direct readout of brain activity is behavior. Although there is a consensus about the fact that our actions are a result of the coordinated activity of our neurons, the causal links between these two phenomena are still largely unknown." (*Dissecting Neuronal Activation on a Brain-Wide Scale With Immediate Early Genes*, Alessandra Franceschini, Irene Costantini, Francesco S. Pavone, and Ludovico Silvestri, Front. Neurosci., 23 October 2020 | https://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2020.569517) The excitation of neurons is sensational news, but it is little more than poking

the brain to see what lights up without knowing with certainty why or what it does.

PART XI. What does all that mean?

It means that in the two sociological cases above, where psychology has been deployed as the lead in social contexts there has been a predictive failure, and where sociology leads there has been a predictive success. Black's argument for a psychology-free zone has at least some evidence-based credibility in that despite seventy years of experimentation based on scientifically validated *psychological* explanations and methods, no emergent social capacity or societal ability exists that has significantly dented even the most violent manifestations of the *sociological* phenomenon of discrimination.

It is a powerful indication that despite the psychical aspect of the nature of prejudice, discrimination is neither a psychological phenomenon nor a psychological problem. Allport's scholarly misdirection in social psychology is congruent to Znaniecki's assessment as to the failure of scholarly sociology, impotence on the matter of what to do about discrimination when it's in evidence as a sociological phenomenon, not a psychological state.

Yet, and not in defense of psychology, Black would quickly point out that neither has sociology's paper tiger of theoretical erudition on the nature of prejudice and discrimination threatened the real-world phenomenon. There is *the inferential psychological concept of prejudice of the mind,* and then there's *the manifestly sociological observable corporeal phenomenon of discrimination in the real world.* "And never the twain shall meet" at some point of resolution in the real world as long as sociological praxis remains the invisible core buried within inferential social psychology and the outer and upper crust of sociology remains centered in noncorporeal theory. I let the experts speak on the matter here.

"Sociology's scientific status is debatable, though not because practitioners rarely make assertions. Many sociologists stand proud at center stage asserting with gusto but rarely displaying genuine concern with testability. They react to an assertion by analyzing, condemning, or praising, which is to say anything other than testing." (Science and Sociology: Predictive Power is the Name of the Game, by Sheldon Ekland-Olson and Jack P. Gibbs, NY: Routledge, 2018)

"Sociology is now in a new era. From its beginning, sociology had lots of theories and very little data, very little

information. Due to technological changes, we have the opposite now. We have a huge amount of information, but we really don't have a good way of understanding what these things mean. This creates a very, very strong need, not just for a sociological attempt to make sense out of this and ask interesting questions, but also it requires sociology to change its way of inquiry. It has to move beyond case studies. It has to move beyond survey research. It has to now invent itself again and find out how it can work with this incredible deluge of information." (Akos Rona-Tas, Professor, UC San Diego)

Znaniecki had hoped to see the integrated methodological components of sociological processes extending to effective and timely problematization, succeeded by normative and factual consensus, then identification and promotion of creative alternative solutions that apply in the real world, unlocking full value, explanatory and predictive. How to accomplish that for good rather than exploitation is itself a *sociological problem* of the first order, the benefits of which would extend far beyond the field of the social sciences.

PART XII. On The Abduction of Science

I stumbled across a "*historic paper*" titled, "The Sociological Roots of Science," (Edgar Zilsel, Social Studies of Science

Vol. 30, №6 (Dec., 2000), pp. 935–949, Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.) In it, Zilsel maps the path of the development of science structures during the tail end of the 1,000 years of the European Dark Ages, a period from 1300 to 1600, differentiating the scholarly university humanistic "literati" from the artisans and "mechanical arts" to which the most important achievements of the Renaissance belonged.

The "artisans, the mariners, shipbuilders, carpenters, foundrymen, and miners worked in silence on the advance of technology and modern society…no doubt the real pioneers of empirical observations, experimentation, and causal research." That's the strata we now know as "STEM" or "STEAM" (science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics), not the literati who only ponder what it all means, 'what it's a case of,' and write about the implications of it all. They are the ones to whom Edgar Zilsel refers to as the "*sociological roots* of science" despite that they were "hardly mentioned by the humanistic literati." (p. 940)

In that light, the *sociological root* strata not only give an indication of where Zilsel might focus the search for the *sociological problem,* but it also makes sociology's current state as largely of a theoretical nature controlled by the literati all the more ironic. It reminds me of one of my

favorite questions, “Are grocery stores the reason we can feed our families, or are they the reason we cannot?”

The justification for expending that much ink on Black’s sociological justice concepts, for our purpose, is that we don’t have to be legal or sociological or psychological scholars or scientists to get our heads around the demarcation lines between the physical, psychical (*mental*), and social, or to know when or whether the lines between them are sharp or fuzzy. We intuitively know the difference between their respective practices and the practitioners. We (or a family member) will know which one to call when we have issues. We can differentiate their specific sets of diagnostic tools and techniques. We know that when one cannot answer a question, we can turn to the other.

We also know that while there may be an identifiable discrete domain (physiological, psychological, or sociological) in which the root cause of each problem is domiciled, cross-over variables in multiple domains may account for the degree of complexity, if not the source, and the ripple effects create interactions between physical, psychical (*mental*), and social phenomena. For example, persistent social stress of marginalization can ripple into problematic psychological and physiological states — even across generations.

Remember Collin's Dictionary's definition of *sociological*? It included, "dealing with social questions or problems, esp. focusing on cultural and environmental factors rather than on psychological or personal characteristics." Donald Black's pure sociology (Black, D. (2000). *Dreams of Pure Sociology*. Sociological Theory, 18(3), 343–367. https://doi.org/10.1111/0735-2751.00105) seeks that brighter, thicker red line between sociology and psychology. In that respect specifically, Black's *sociological* thought process is important for Sociological Safety™ as existing separately and distinct from psychological safety but with some relation to it. In the broader sociological sense, his incisive sociological separatist perspective, though radical, could be a helpful extreme position in the argument structure toward objectively defining and applying the concept of the *sociological problem*.

To the extent that there is an internal "war" inside sociology over its nature and future, even those who write extensively about its varied battlegrounds and skirmishes cannot seem to string together the words "*sociological*" and "*problem*" in anything but the most incidental way. In all of its nearly 500 pages, a discussion of sociology is devoid of any mention of it, save one auxiliary reference to "the sociological problem of solidarity and antagonism" (p. 210, "The Public Sociology Wars" by Frank Furedi) and nowhere else in the book. That's

“a sociological problem,” giving a fleetingly obtuse clue on how to construct “the sociological problem” as a class of problems, but not much more. (Handbook of Public Sociology / edited by Vincent Jeffries, 2009, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.) Given that we know that the concept of a “*sociological problem*” exists, the fact of the lacuna is simply stunning.

The late Richard Helmut Grathoff (1934–2013), an editor of the Znaniecki monograph, “***What Are Sociological Problems***”, (Dulczewski, Grathoff, Wlodarek, 1994) concluded that even after considerable relevant research produced in the field of sociology, by the time of the monograph’s publication, the title question, “*What are Sociological Problems remains an open venue*.” That seems to have remained true down to this writing. The “sociological problem” seems to have fallen overboard, so to speak, as the field sailed toward today, challenging the ability to establish a contemporary meaning. Just as T.S. Eliot fretted over the habit of prefixing justice with the word “social,” the term ‘sociological problem’ may well have suffered the fate of having lost its rational content, beaten out by the term “social problem.” But perhaps not irretrievably so.

One cannot help feeling that the lost meaning of the *sociological problem* was an unforced error of sociology

early in the game, not unrelated to the confiscation of science. Psychology has poached social behavior from the hands of sociologists in the same way the literati poached science from the hands of mechanics and “tinkerers” who produced real inventions. It’s worth repeating that sociology is limping on a less than pure specificity in differentiation between problems that are social, problems that are societal, problems that are institutional, and problems that are sociological, when held against the backdrop of the problems of contemporary sociology, and *problems of execution in the science itself*.

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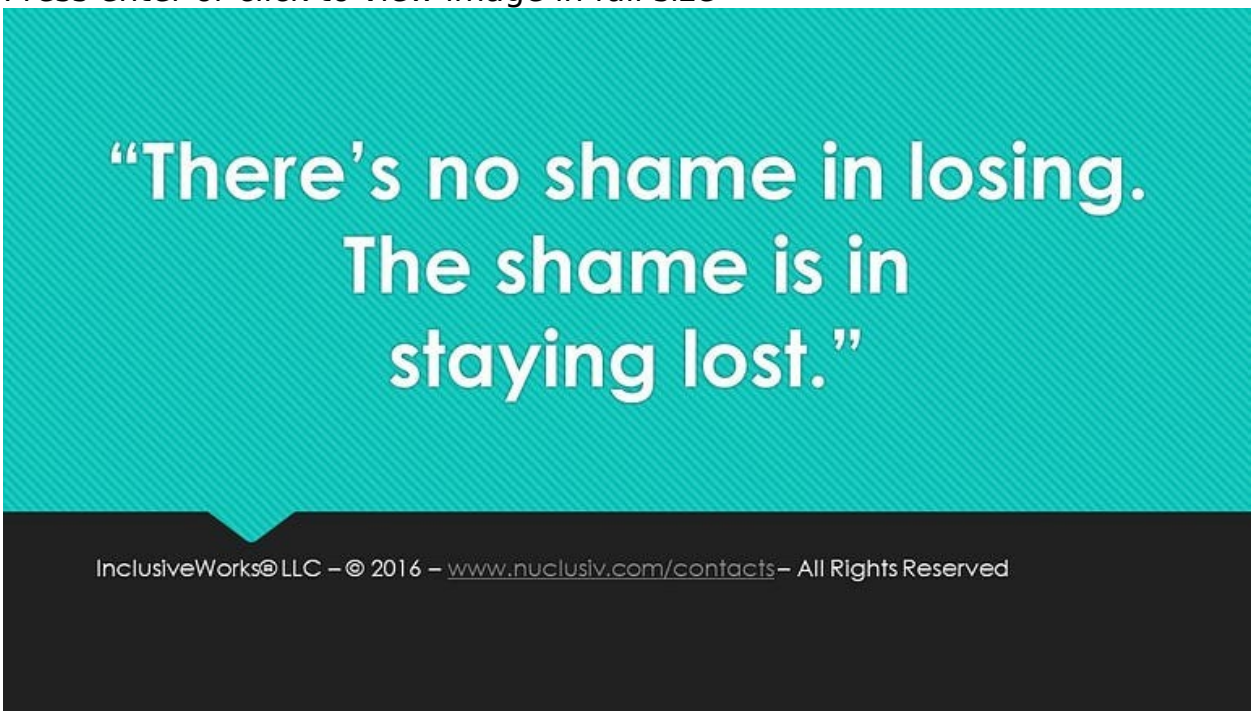

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That has left us with what can be understood as the aforementioned “hole in science” through which we can peer

and see an open field of play upon which theoretical, applied, clinical, and other sociologists might revisit the concept of the *sociological problem, with a mind toward problematizing it* and shaping how it should apply in 21st Century social science. The term "praxis" means practice, as distinguished from theory, the process of using a theory or something else that you have learned in a practical way. By so doing, we can fully accomplish the work of any science, or of anything else we do. "*Qui bene distinguit bene docet*" (Black's Law Dictionary: 2nd Edition 2 Inst. 470).

It doesn't seem like it should be all that hard to fix, with integrative thinking.

Professor Akos Rona-Tas continues, "What we are learning more and more is that thinking is a social process, that you are not just thinking with your brain, your individual head, but you are also thinking with other people's head. And you are working, thinking not just with other people's head, but you are also thinking with objects around you…So thinking is not a solitary but a social process. To understand, for instance, how to structure social situations, to have good ideas emerge from that, to optimize these processes, is what sociologists can actually help with."

Without a doubt, the process of problematizing and the context of the sociological problem are in play, along with delineating and isolating the threads of psychological from sociological in developing the problem statement, theories, predictive assertion, corporeal solution development, and operational praxis.

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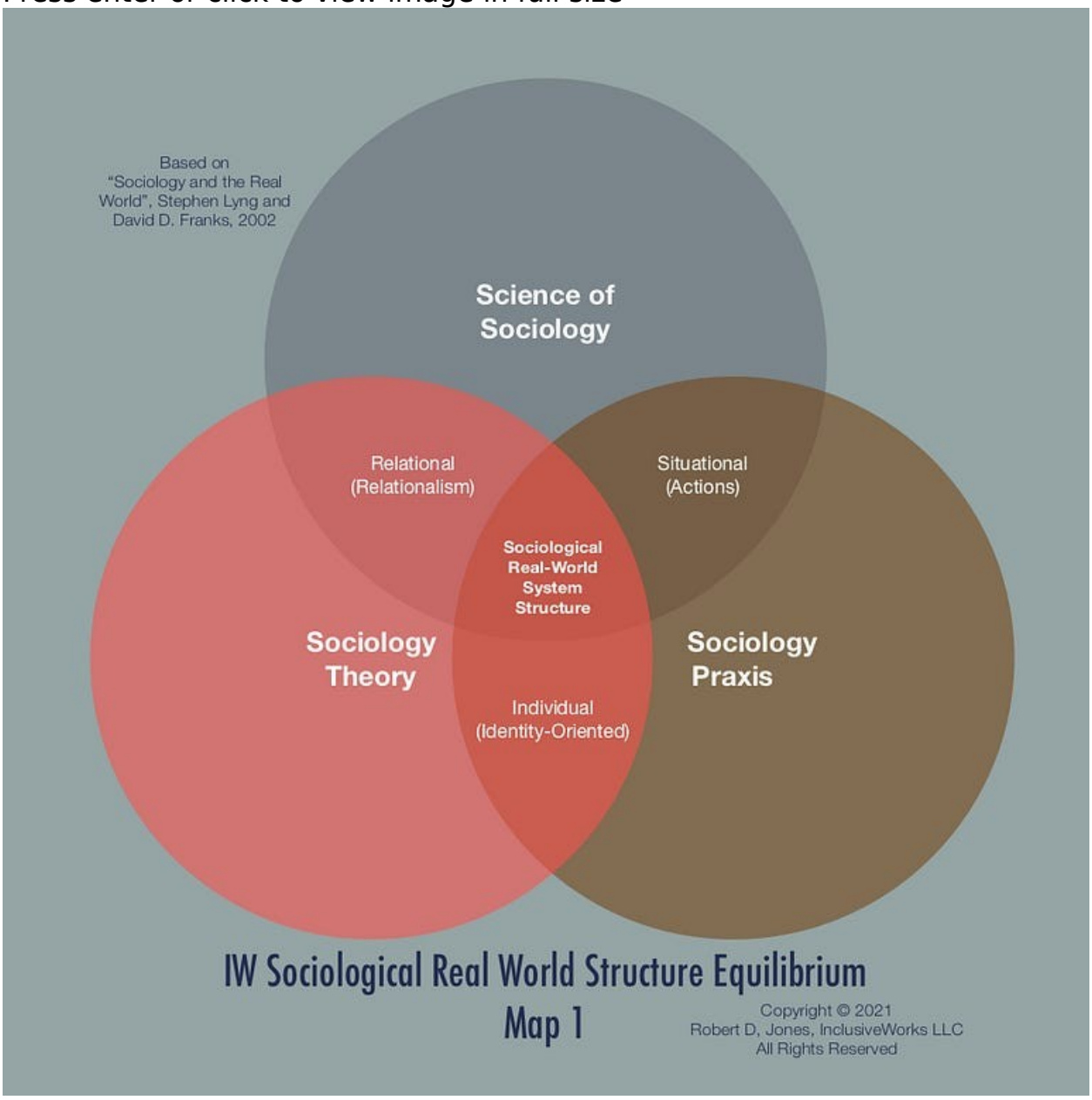


InclusiveWorks Sociological Real World Structure — Yeah. That's it.

This is where I concluded the search for the *sociological problem*. I've come to see Florian Znaniecki as sociology's Elwood P. Dowd and the sociological problem as Harvey the Pooka. Though not the first to acknowledge its existence, Znaniecki saw it, spoke to it, walked with it, and his sociological thinking was informed by it. He even introduced it to a few people. But that's as far as it seems it's been able to get. Yet, its name and invisible presence linger in the sociological memory in association with the name and scholarship of Florian Znaniecki.

PART XIII. SOCIOLOGICAL SAFETY ™ — A SOLUTION LOOKING FOR A SOCIOLOGICAL PROBLEM?

For our purposes, the concept of *sociological safet*y as a proposed approach to at least a few solutions in problematic areas of social interaction at scale begs the context of a matching *sociological proble*m framed as a question to which *sociological safety* can respond. That's no different than any other kind of proposed solution or approach. Solutions for problems may already exist, but framing the problem first is how we reason that there is indeed a solution, ready and waiting, or one that must be developed. So, does that mean we're putting forward *sociological safety a*s a solution looking for a problem?

No, categorically and absolutely not.

Well, okay, *maybe a little*. But certainly, no more so than *psychological* safety was up to the 1990s, and most likely considerably less so. Amy Edmondson introduced "team psychological safety" as "*a shared belief held by members of a team that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking*." ("Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams," Administrative Science Quarterly, Vol. 44, №2, June, 1999) It has since come to narrowly mean *laypersons employing interpersonal processes and practices that produce a psychological sense of safety* rather than psychologists practicing theoretical professional methods and approaches safely. So, we know where to look to define and create a congruous parallel reality for *sociological safety* — and where not to look. Edmondson's concept of "shared belief" is not the same thing as "shared reality." The differences are discussed in other considerations of Sociological Safety™.

The term *sociological problem* is out there already, waiting for members of the set to appear and align themselves within the circle. We're proposing *safety* and a safety ecosystem as the newest entry into the ranks of sociological problems. The point is not an assessment of whether Znaniecki's observed and qualified *sociological problems* have or have not found matching *sociological solutions* in contemporary social

sciences, or whether his conception of it was scientifically on point or merely woven from whole cloth.

The point strictly is that *the sociological problem concept exists,* at least a few folks thought it was relevant and useful for a half-century or so, and that Lincolnesque prepositions are key puzzle pieces that help to resolve the ubiquitous incongruity between sociological and other problems' classifications in sociology.

Theories are called such for their suppositional nature. Sociological information, no matter how much of it we acquire, will always be incomplete and may always be at risk of becoming obsolete. Sociological solutions proposed will always be imperfect. The conjectural lacunae, *sociological problem,* and *sociological safety* with it are analogized upon obvious parallels in the sciences and seem to have escaped observation or have not been reported in description to this point.

The enigma is how, through it all, the "*sociological problem"* somehow managed to slip by undetected and has certainly escaped sociological definition. Or quite possibly, the idea of it has been silently and summarily rejected, buried in the past, and barred from inclusion in the contemporary academic sociological lexicon. That may well

be because the *sociological problem is* as much like a big hairy Sasquatch as it is a unicorn. In the case of the *sociological problem*, it stands as a definitional outlier, in part because of its syntactic use, different from the other social science monikers.

“Sociology” has retained some of its primal breadths as the trunk of the sociological tree that branches into what are now the “other” social sciences, but has also picked up the sense of a lesser branch to its original conception, one that deals primarily with theory, hypothesis and analysis more than applied practice. Of the four terminological problem types in the opening of this article, the *social, physiological, and psychological* problem types are clearly positioned as the most congruent applications across the sciences. The “*sociological problem,*” not so much in contemporary American Sociology or in general use. That may be so to the extent that social scientists (as opposed to sociological scientists) may see that term as more of a lost opportunity, its rightful place long and permanently conscripted, occupied by “social” and perhaps even squandered, based on the perceived level of difficulty of recovering its position and standing in the social sciences.

But it is still the only term that intuitively feels loftier and more “roomy” at the top so as to handle increasing

sociological complexity, matters of theoretical if not also practical, applied, or clinical interest. After more than 120 years, the term “sociological problem” hasn’t lost that new car smell. It could be recontextualized to sustain the strictly theoretical discipline of sociology as the engine of “*the science of humankind*,” but has the leg-room to accommodate and contain an integrative multidisciplinary, transdisciplinary, or meta-/mega-disciplinary approach *within itself* at both theoretical and practical levels across the broad spectrum of the social sciences. It’s up for grabs.

The *sociological problem* categorization could easily come to be understood as all-encompassing of even the full range of the social science array, as the term “sociology” once was. Thus, no specific application of the phrase “*sociological problem”* is currently debated. Perhaps because it has flown below the radar for so long, it is more open and malleable (soft) than terms like physiological or psychological problems in natural sciences burdened with more direct ties to hard laws and rules. Even within the field of sociology in the limited instances of its publically accessible occurrences, it is employed in widely varying ways, albeit infrequent.

PART XIV. CONCLUSION

In summary, what has this search for the *sociological problem* accomplished?

The first accomplishment is that I probably won't have to write about it or explain it again when discussing Sociological Safety™. Fortunately, that's not the end of the list.

Another is that the term sociological has uniquely nuanced twists of meaning and incongruities that seem to have created inconsistencies and limitations to comprehension in its practical usage over the last century.

The search of the literature also found support for the idea that there's a place for the reemergent *sociological problem* as a contemporary term of art, having traced it from the very early 1900s to Florian Znaniecki's poignant 20th century posits, but barely a trace of it since. More recently, Lyng and Franks' modern-day (2002) expression of the longstanding "*basic problem of sociology"* harmonizes, even dovetails with Znaniecki's descriptive existential warnings through to his end in the late 1950s. This consistent and persistent concern was channeled by Professor Shiela Allen in her Presidential Address to the British Sociological Association in 1977. (*Sociology and Sociological Practice*, Sheila Allen, Sociology Vol. 13, №2 (May 1979), pp. 275–281)

A wide range of assessments of sociology's standing abounds in the literature, from its being an inconsequential science to its being a legitimate science, paradigm and all, with no shortage of those suggesting existential crisis in, of, and for sociology.

The literature reveals a reasonable facsimile of a long-standing paradigm sans paradigmatic shift. "The sociological paradigm" is defined as a fundamental picture of the society (concept, structure, and societal dynamics) that has been more or less accepted by the association of sociologists in certain periods of this science development. Petar Hafner made direct reference to "the sociological paradigm" as a subset of scientific paradigm, saying that, "The concept of scientific paradigm, and particularly the sociological paradigm, is closely connected to sociological theories." (*Theories and Paradigms in Sociology* UDC: 316.2:316.286 Petar Hafner Faculty of Economics, University of NIŠ The scientific journal Facta Universitatis Series: Philosophy and Sociology Vol.1, No 5, 1998 pp. 455–464)

We've established that sociology is "closely connected to sociological theories," with little sign of moving off the dime. After nearly a century of despairing existential concern over theoretical sociology's persistent monastic sequestration, the literature begs the question of whether the perceived crisis

of sociological disembodiment is genuinely existential, even whether it is a crisis at all. Could all of these learned sociological voices have been merely the Chicken Little of sociology, a cohort of proverbial boys who cried wolf? It's the kind of thing that makes you say, "Hmmm." There are only two possibilities.

We have narrowed down sociology's options to two possibilities: Either sociology is relevant, or it isn't.

Is sociology irrelevant? There is literally a century of sociological data and its analysis and literary interpretation archived within our reach, but apparently not within the grasp of the real world. The body of sociological literature, which hasn't stopped growing, seems to exist in a netherworld, steeped in ostensible empiricism yet devoid of applicability beyond further theorization. Relative to solutions for what most people experience as "the real world" problems, most of the sociological work "begins and ends on paper," as Lyng & Franks reminded, such that what happens in sociology stays in sociology.

It's a scientific Berlin Wall. The century-long mountain range of sociological paper remains "walled-off from the world of application." Sociologists themselves, including but not limited to those mentioned herein, admit it is characterized

by incoherence, relativism, academic textual incomprehensibility, and is of questionable societal value in its current state. As Lyng & Franks points out, 'the sociological voice is not present in public debate.' We might therefore conclude that though disembodied sociology still exists, it is an apparition, an irrelevant field of academic voyeuristic literary philosophical hacks rearranging the sociological deck chairs on its scientific Titanic.

Or, is sociology still relevant? The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that there were fewer than 3,000 American sociologist jobs in 2020. "Employment of sociologists is projected to grow 5 percent from 2020 to 2030, slower than the average for all occupations. Despite limited employment growth, about 300 U.S. openings for sociologists are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Most of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire." It is asserted by some that "At the dawn of the 21st century, sociology in the United States of America is a social science that is both applied and basic, subjective and objective." That may give American Sociology the leg up on capturing an HD High Res academic snapshot of the sociological sasquatch — maybe even a video.

European sociologists, on the other hand, are maybe just beginning to lean toward a more pragmatic and contemporarily relevant application of sociology. In a post-pandemic environment, the dawning realization amongst the European Sociological Association is, "*that there is no way back to the previous world, whatever its goods and bads*." Therefore, there is a powerful sense in European sociology that the pandemic's long-haul sociological effects compel reluctant consideration of the Frankensteinian construct, what they've termed "public sociology."

The Chair of ESA's Communications Committee, Luigi Pellizzoni, seems to tentatively suggest cracking open the doors of the sociological mountaintop monastery. "Against this backdrop," he says, "ESA seems to be called to a particularly challenging task, as a venue for sociologists to strengthen their efforts and capacity of insight into the dynamics at work in current societies, European and the world over; and this both at scientific and at policy level — as academic and as *public sociology*."

Whether sociology is relevant or not, it still exists and produces a substantial body of fresh literary work at no small investment by universities, governments, and individuals in pursuit of terminal degrees who spend years in sociological research before and after their terminal attainments. "On the

one hand," wrote Lyng & Franks, "no other social science discipline is more formally committed to the study of social problems, with sociologists historically dominating the large and influential Society for the Study of Social Problems, playing leading roles in managing and contributing to the Society's prestigious journal *Social Problems…"* It feels like a paradox, in that the more problems and facets of those problems sociologists discover, all the better for the journal's continuity and longevity.

It's not that there aren't gaps to fill in other social sciences. Psychologists, for example, suffer some demonstrable disconnects between theory and praxis. One recent scoping review of psychology literature "suggests psychological intervention papers report, at most, 64% of the information needed to implement interventions." The speculative result is that "Psychologists are spending a considerable amount of time researching and developing interventions, in hopes that our efforts can help to tackle some of society's pressing problems. Unfortunately, those hopes are often not realized — many interventions are developed and reported in our journals but do not make their way into the broader world they were designed to change." ("*Do We Report the Information that is Necessary to Give Psychology Away? A Scoping Review of the Psychological Intervention Literature 2000–2018*", Bharathy Premachandra and Neil A. Lewis, Jr.,

Stating it conversely, at the very least, 36% of the information critical for intervention success is missing in action, likely more. The corollary is that psychological intervention implementation efforts in organizations would naturally and preponderantly tend to fail absent that amount of key data. “One potential reason for this is that there may be a gap between the information reported in our papers, and the information others, such as practitioners, need to implement our findings.” The authors astutely point up this kind of methodological chasm in the science of psychology *which has the potential* to inform practice, policy, education, and research in the social sciences as a whole. (*Note that the authors do not term the gap a “psychological problem.*”)

That 36% information gap falls within the delivery stage that businesses call “*the last mile*.” In telecom, the last tenth of physical networks that deliver communication services to those who rely on the system constrains speed, creating a bottleneck in data transmission, both down and up. Supply chain management’s last mile is the final leg of the transportation journey that moves people and packages from distribution warehouses/hubs to final destinations. The

delivery of psychological interventions apparently suffers the same or greater logistical challenges in technology/technique transfer critical to the success of those who most need it.

Premachandra & Lewis remark, “Unfortunately, psychologists have traditionally been ill-equipped to take on the challenge of translating insights from our studies into effective interventions that can be brought to scale,” and “it is presently unclear whether the decades of intervention research psychologists and other social scientists have conducted is, in fact, ready for broader implementation and scaling.”

The Premachandra & Lewis finding also begs the key Machiavellian question series above, which the authors don’t touch. Who has benefited from this 36% psychological last-mile logistical collapse in the literature? Is that gap bigger in this century or smaller than in the last? What’s the trend? Why has it persisted unchallenged by psychology’s theorists, academicians, or practitioners for so long? Suggesting an *inadvertent methodological oversight* as causation strains credulity, given the billions of dollars spent annually on industrial-organizational psychological interventions and the many thousands of practitioners engaged to implement and execute them.

While that may sound like paranoia to a psychologist, to others it may sound like one piece of the methodological puzzle accounting for the APA admission of complicity in sociological oppression. “As part of the nation’s historic reckoning on racism, the American Psychological Association has apologized to communities of color for its role — and the role of the discipline of psychology — in contributing to systemic racism.”

That, from the horse’s mouth.

Perhaps, then, it is even more appropriate to consider sociological motives as a key piece of the puzzle explaining the ineffable nature of the term *sociological problem* which is universally euphemized as “*social problems*.” Sociological theorists cannot identify the game if the ball is cloaked. Practitioners can’t hit what they can’t see, let alone develop and design interventions and execute them.

All of those possibilities and concepts discussed and cited herein are far from the only attempts at salvaging, reconceptualizing, and clearly if only tacitly defining a unifying meaning of the *sociological problem*. In other words, it’s not a sure bet that Znaniecki, Merton, DeLanda, Allen, Black, and Lyng & Frank were talking about matters entirely unrelated to it, but perhaps instead, facets, or shared sets of

vertically integrated social, societal, institutional, and *sociological problems and problematization* in the methods and approaches of theoretical sociology as well as the fact of its conspicuous absence in sociological praxis, treatment, and cures.

Despite his standing in the field, and his complex and impressive expository, Znaniecki didn't take it upon himself to propose a constraining or all-encompassing definition of the *sociological problem.* Though Merton certainly contributed toward doing so, his attempt apparently didn't break through the theoretical ice, either. Yet, their mentions of it, and efforts to instantiate the class of the sociological problem gave it a contextual frame, a location in scientific space, and did all that's necessary to have adequately validated the name.

In the end, it may not matter whether approaches to the *sociological problem* and *problematization* emanate from top-down theories like Assemblage, or by means of a recoupled Transactional Sociology of Lyng & Franks, or by way of establishing Black's carve-out of a "pure sociology" for law and other professional fields of endeavor, or from bottom-up practitioner interventions like InclusiveWorks' analytical assessment of a robust sociological programmatic orientation of manifest sociological safety as means of

getting to a complete space of professional “real world” practice. They are all, explicitly or not, begging the question of uncovering a core definition of and approach to the *sociological problem* unencumbered by incongruities and constraints and released to the public eye.

Social Workers are never called sociologists, even though they are working on social problems. Psychologists work on psychological problems but are never called sociologists, even if they are working on social problems. Physiologists work on physiological problems and are not called sociologists, even if they are working on social problems. Sociologists working on social problems are never professionally described as “socialists.” (*Well, maybe sometimes, but that’s a different issue.*) What, though, are sociologists if they never work on *sociological problems?* If a problem falls in the sociological forest and there are no professionals around to hear it, does it make a sound? The laws of physics would answer, “Yes.”

Langston Hughes might have called that “a problem deferred.”

PART XV. Reprise: The Future is a Fairly Big Place.

It’s plenty roomy, we’d hope, for accommodating a reconsideration of old but important ideas and concepts. But the future is also one more place that cannot (yet) be observed by the human eye. Still, like Einstein on his lunch breaks at the Patent Office, each of us makes at least some attempt to solve for the future daily, i.e., “solve” as in solving a theoretical problem. (We never know if tomorrow’s problems will become practical or remain theoretical until we get there.) Some of us work to solve our own problems alone, others for humanity. Some are satisfied to solve for tomorrow, others for posterity.

Einstein first theorized and predicted the existence of black holes in space way back in 1916, and it took 100 years for scientists to collaborate and build a camera to take the first photograph of one. It was the limitations of technology that prevented finding what he had theorized on paper and chalkboards rather than professional restrictions on engaging in the search. It took 100 years for the technological limitations to recede to capture the literal modern-day equivalent of Znaniecki’s “social image.”

The sociological problem itself may well be a “hole in science,” and it shouldn’t take a century or an Einstein to get a good picture of it. It’s not that there aren’t physiological, biological, and psychological theories and some interplay

between them. There are. Though those fields and their disciplines have inference through them all, they are executed as preponderantly practical and are not dominated or unduly constrained by their theoretical factions. Even psychology in recent decades is resorting to fMRI technology to attempt to link mind-to-brain connections as it relates to bioelectrical activity in cognition and electrochemical measurement methods and biochemical brain processes in the physiology of emotions. We can see how the social and natural sciences are distributing the responsibility for formulating theory and driving it toward the level of real-world application.

A question posed early in this writing finds its answer here, *"Who has the role of proposing solutions for unresolved and otherwise unsurvivable societal problems?"* The broad realm of "science" and technology has traditionally been invoked as holding the answers to mankind's biggest problems. They don't get any bigger than existential. Frankly, we're all breathing, eating, drinking, and simmering in the existential bi-products of so-called technological scientific progress. If sociology is still relevant, there may be no better time or place than now and here to engage full-spectrum sociological science to get all of mankind on the same sociological page to define and solve (or at least delay)

the dire sociological problems that constitute the current threat of the now glaringly inevitable.

The comforting reality is that the social sciences possess more than adequate capacity, if not the political will, to quickly come to a unified understanding and application of the term *sociological problem(s)*. “Unified understanding” doesn’t necessitate complete agreement or even consensus on every matter to which the case of the *sociological problem* might apply. That can evolve. But, it does necessitate a willingness to move forward in the same general direction as it evolves. People are still desperately seeking and openly pleading for safe interaction within and between groups, cultures, nations, and societies, and grappling with entrenched institutions. But like sociologists, they appear to be completely unaware of the now-defunct use of the word “*sociological*” to discuss framing dysfunctional human interaction, its causations, or the solutions.

The venue for crystallization of the *sociological problem* is wide open for shaping the 21st Century sociological enterprise and the instrumentalities by which cultural and intercultural social, societal, and institutional phenomena can be addressed as sociological phenomena, both privately and publicly. Ekland-Olson & Gibbs assert that “Definitions

are also of critical importance to science…consensual definitions of words and terms…" (p. 3), but they never mention the *sociological problem*, nor do they cite Znaniecki, even though my sociological heart skipped a beat when they managed to squeeze in the word "*lacuna*." (p. 49) But it proved to be a false alarm, a different lacuna altogether. Apparently, there are lots of sociological lacunae. (Science and Sociology: Predictive Power is the Name of the Game by Sheldon Ekland-Olson and Jack P. Gibbs)

The common denominator of a universal desire for safety seems a perfect place to start the journey toward solving that and other big hairy *sociological problems* as well. This century is already 21% behind us. Gotta get busy. Whatever the social sciences eventually decide *the sociological problem* should mean in the 21st Century, those on the outside of sociology may not want to wait too long before getting hold of it and putting it to work.

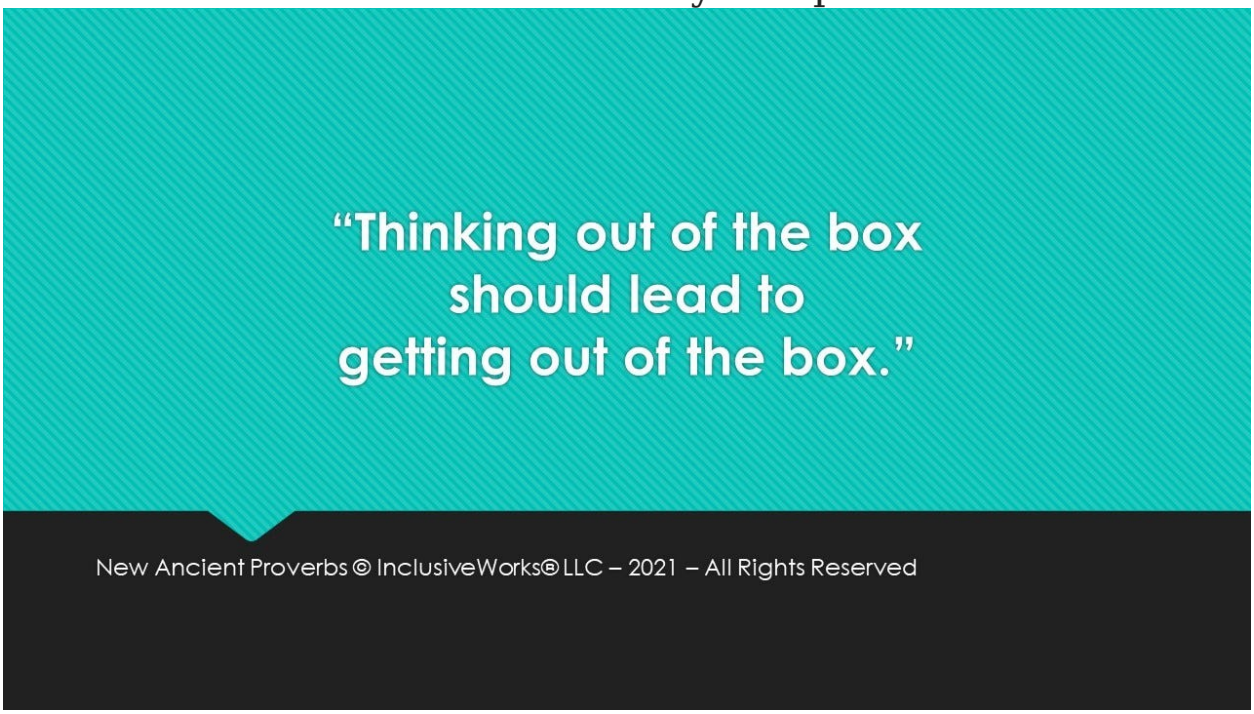
The question, after all of this, is whether we can see the problem.

In the near term, organizational leaders are looking for something that creates a new dynamic, rather than adding to the din of the old. InclusiveWorks begins the task of building a generally accepted definition of the class *sociological*

problem, starting with the Sociological Safety™ member of the class. It may at times feel like trying to ride a bicycle while building it, but the building is a journey with a clear destination. Therefore:

- InclusiveWorks LLC will treat all questions about both the Sociological Problem and Sociological Safety™ along with their reasonable and legitimate answers as mileposts toward a more robust Safety Ecosystem that includes a discrete Sociological Safety™ domain.
- InclusiveWorks LLC proceeds with declaring the new variable on the explicit assumption that the "*sociological problem"* lacuna is at the heart of what many both inside and on the outside of the field of sociology are trying to articulate in varying ways, grammar and syntax issues notwithstanding, especially but not exclusively when using terms like *cultural, systemic, societal,* and *institutional*.
- InclusiveWorks LLC approaches Sociological Safety™ as a concrete instance of a new variable, a variant within the class of the Sociological Problem.
- InclusiveWorks LLC approaches Sociological Safety™ as instantiating the class of the Sociological Problem (again), but for 21st-century application.

- InclusiveWorks LLC approaches Sociological Safety™ acknowledging that theoretical sociology is already powerfully implicated by the “sociological problem.”
- InclusiveWorks LLC approaches the class “Sociological Problem” as the venue of reciprocally informed and driven theory and praxis.



Ancient Proverbs Newly Coined — Rob Jones

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